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MRS. KEITH'S CRIME

A Record

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'O Wedding-Guest! this soul has been
Alone on a wide, wide sea'

NEW EDITION

KX. c. 260

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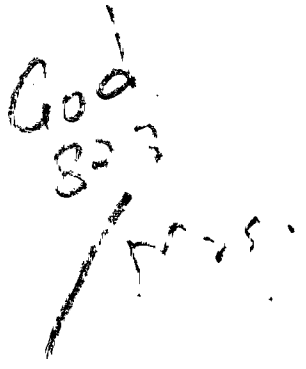

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TO

M. D. W.

MRS. KEITH'S CRIME.

It would be useless to try to account for the manner in which this history came to be written down. It is obvious that Mrs. Keith's hand could not have written it, nor could her voice have given it utterance, and there was none by her in that hour when love gave her terrible strength, and left her to brave eternity. It seems almost as if, as she passed along, the air itself bore witness and the wind swept into the heart of one who understood all the unspoken thoughts of that passionate life.

CHAPTER I.

It cannot be true; it must be fancy. The child is growing, has grown too fast, is delicate, and he did not know what to say, and yet he looked so grave when he heard that my mother and sister had both long ago died of consumption. 'It often skips a

generation, and then shows itself again,' he said, and he seemed sorry for us when he said good-bye.

If anything happened to Molly I should go mad — to Molly, the little one who came six months after her father died; Molly, with the strange longing that half frightens me written in her eyes, a longing that perhaps only years hence I shall learn to understand;—to Molly, who is more than half the living world to me. More than half, I say, for there is Jack; and a bonnie boy is Jack, going on for eight years old. He has sturdy legs, and wide-open blue eyes, and a crop of golden hair. But my heart has never ached for him as it has for Molly, and love has no bands that bind so fast and close as those that fear and sorrow weave. If Molly dies—— But I dare not think of it, for I can face nothing, can go on no longer, if that is to be. After all, we have only a certain amount of courage in us, and mine was all used up in past days; there is none left for this.

How cruel it seems. I sit down and try to think over the years since Molly's father died. They are only a few, after all, and yet how long a time they seem. You know how it all came about, how happy we were, how in an hour the whole world changed. It is maddening to remember it—the summer morning and the sunshine; and the laughter of the children on the beach; and his last words, 'I shall

not be long, my darling. Go home and wait for me. You are tired.' I got up and went home, turning, as I stood on the steps, to take another look at the sea—the sea that was killing him even while I looked, and laughed, and felt so happy; and then I waited for him just as he had told me. They carried him back. I can hear the slow tramp, tramp of their feet now, and see the water dropping from his hair and the cloth with which they had covered him. There he lay, he who but an hour before had been a strong man, dead—dead for evermore. . . .

There was no money when Arthur died. His pictures were only just beginning to sell. We had made this little home in St. John's Wood, and lived on hope and credit and the few commissions that came in, and on anything that turned up; a pleasant, happy-go-lucky life enough, but one in which there was no margin left for accident or sorrow. I wrote to Uncle Clement, the one relation we had in the world, or rather, the only one at all likely to help us. He was very good in a rather cold, hold-aloof manner. He and my father had never been very cordial brothers; the one was rich, and the other had had nothing but his pay, and many a deep gulf is dug with gold, especially between relations. But he was very good to the children and me, and let us stay in this little house, and kept us going, to a certain extent.

When I got better I wanted to do something for myself, and, after much consideration, decided to give lessons in painting; but it was very difficult to get pupils, and at last I tried doing portraits of children, and met with a great deal of success. I don't do them very well, perhaps, but the mothers say that I have a knack of catching a likeness, and of catching it just when a child is looking its prettiest; so they are always pleased, and gradually I have become almost a fashion, and, though my work is certainly not well paid for, I can get as many portraits to do as I please.

Uncle Clement died three years since, and left me a hundred a year; it is to go to Jack at my death. Poor little Molly was ignored altogether, for Uncle Clement did not like girls; he thought them mere frivolities, that sensible women only bore sons, and to daughters he would give no encouragement.

On the whole we have managed pretty well, I think bitterly, as I look round the little drawing-room, with the palms, and the Japanese fans, and the little bits of china, and the daring gold-and-chocolate covers, that give the room an individuality of its own. I have been so proud of our little home and of all the folk, working-folk mostly, artists like myself, who came to see me. It has been something to feel that they recognised me and numbered me

among themselves, as if they knew all the longings that were in my work, all the hard-trying and good intentions, and were mercifully blind to the weakness of its execution. Sometimes I have been really successful, and have seen my name in the catalogue of the minor exhibitions. Once it was in the Grosvenor list, and it made me so happy, I felt as if I was swimming through the crowd at the private view, and that all the world was making way for me, conscious of my triumph and sharing it. It seems so foolish now, but I have even tried to learn the names of safe investments for small sums, feeling that the time would come soon when a little could be put by for Jack's education; and now suddenly all this dreaming has vanished.

Molly has been looking ill for a long time. We went for a fortnight to Broadstairs and spent the days together, we three never separating, but staying all day upon the beach, or dawdling along the little pier, or wandering through the fields to Ramsgate, and drinking milk, and driving back in an extravagant fly. But still she did not get better. She was only growing, I thought, and waited; but she did not get better. Then at last I took her to Dr. Finch. He is a great man; there is no disputing his opinion; and when he had examined Molly he looked grave enough, and said that the best thing of all would be to get her out of England for the

winter. 'It may be the saving of her,' he said gently. It may! I looked up at him half dazed. I am half dazed still.

Mrs. Marshall was waiting to see me when we returned, about her little godchild's portrait. I told her what Dr. Finch had said, and told her so calmly that she looked at me curiously as she answered, 'It is very sad for you.' She said the words in an odd, polite voice, as if she wondered whether I cared. Perhaps it bored her to be told about the child, for she is an odd, formal person with an even passionless voice and a strange unsympathetic manner. Once I caught myself wondering whether her husband had made love to her before he married her, and if he did now, and whether she ever did anything kind, save as a matter of principle. With her all things seem to have a foundation of principles or convictions, and love and pity and hate to have no power over her. Perhaps it is an excellent thing; principles and convictions give one cold comfort, but they are responsible for few crimes.

'I am not sure that I can undertake the portrait,' I told her. 'There are some things to finish, and we are going abroad for the winter.'

'You can arrange to leave your work and go?' she asked, in surprise. She knew me a little in old days when Arthur was here, and knew what a struggle we had, and how necessary Uncle Clement's

help had been afterwards. I half resented the question.

'I must,' I answered. 'One does not consider whether one can arrange a thing that may save one's child's life.'

'Going abroad is very expensive,' she said. Her words were considerate, but her voice was still only polite; there was not the ghost of any sympathy in it. It was just as well, in the state of mind I was in.

'It may be expensive,' I answered; 'but at the worst we'll walk, and I'll carry the babes on my back.'

'You'll have to swim across the Channel,' she said, with an odd, grim smile.

A flood of memories rushed into my heart at her words, and I checked a little cry that all but escaped my lips. In a moment I had seen Arthur going down to the sea, and had heard him tell me once again to wait for him. Perhaps the message he sent me the moment that he died is written in Molly's eyes; for the first time it went through me like a flash that this was the strange meaning in them that I was for ever yearning to understand. Mrs. Marshall turned almost pale as she realised all that her words had made me remember.

'I am very sorry,' she said humbly; 'it was very stupid of me. I am always saying the wrong things.

How old is Molly?' she asked, in an abrupt voice, as if anxious to do the best she could towards separating my thoughts from my memories.

'She is nearly six; she is the baby,' I answered.

She was silent for a moment, and then she said, more to herself than to me, 'Yes, I understand; I dare say you will always call her the baby, even when she is grown up.'

And then she went away, and I have come in here to rest and to try and realise what it all means.

It is odd how different this room looks to-day; there is something cruel and mocking about it. There, on the easel, is the picture Clarence Grove gave me at Christmas. The foreground is coarsely painted, but I never noticed that before. I turn from it, and look at the palms standing in large pots on the floor of the little conservatory; the black-and-white pavement makes me shiver. The flowers about the room are fresh and bright; the chintz covers have a happy dainty air. There is something satisfying about the whole place, and yet Molly is upstairs, and the doctor says that if she goes abroad it may—only that it may, and not that it will—be the saving of her. It is odd how difficult it is to feel or realise all that is in the words, though Molly is just life to me. It seems as if I had changed into some other person, and, keeping my

own set of memories, look on half curiously at the old self which has shut a door of some kind on me, so that I can no longer enter it. Or else something has failed, some of the wheels in me have ceased to go, as in a machine a little bit out of order. It seems impossible that in a month's time we shall all be in another land, and the studio closed, and the commissions going elsewhere, and this pretty room will be all covered up, and the palms and the flowers will be dying, and the big picture taken down from the easel and turned with its face to the wall. I wonder what made Clarence Grove give that picture to me? for he is not rich and he has a wife and many children. It is called 'The Forsaken Garden,' after Swinburne's poem, and there is a quotation under it—'Bright with a summer to be.' In fancy I have often wandered down the half-hidden pathways, and among the brake and briar. It makes me shudder to think of the people who once made the garden trim and neat and full of sweet-smelling flowers; they are all sleeping in the churchyard—you can see their graves over the hill in the corner there—and the sea is breaking on the shingly beach below, and the sun is shining, and strangers are coming to make the garden trim again and to laugh through 'the summer to be.' I am never tired of wondering who these are that are coming.

I wonder how we shall get the money to take

us abroad? This question is beginning to present itself. There are some commissions, but no time to execute them. There is very little money in the house. At Christmas there will be fifty pounds due, but rent and taxes to pay out of it. The money must be found; but how? We have nothing to sell, and no one of whom to borrow. It seems impossible to get it, and yet it must be got somehow. If it only saves her; if only some day I sit here again, knowing that she is upstairs, bright and strong and sturdy as Jack is, what trifles all the difficulties will seem looking back at them across the good thing that will have been accomplished. How would it do, I wonder, if we went to some warm spot in the south—we could just manage to get there, perhaps—and then I tried to earn some money by painting portraits? Long ago, in Switzerland—it was in the first year of our marriage—we were staying at a mountain place, shivering with cold, and calling the man who built the rooms without fireplaces an idiot, when one day a travelling artist turned up. Never dreaming that Arthur was of his own trade, he painted our portraits and the portraits of four or five other people in the hotel, for ten francs each, and then packed up his canvas, rolled it round with black American cloth, and went on his way as blithe as a swallow journeying south. Why should not I do that kind of thing? It would be very gipsy-like

and independent. Perhaps I might take clothes enough in my pocket to give a hand to each of the children, or carry them on my back as I had suggested to Mrs. Marshall; or at any rate I might put them, and our luggage too, into a wheelbarrow and push it on in front. Arthur and I often used to sit and speculate on various ways of living, wondering out of which most happiness could be got.

'I should like a caravan,' I remember saying to him once, 'with brooms and brushes and baskets hanging outside, and a chimney-pot and smoke coming out of it; and inside there should be a little bed to sleep in, and a little stove to cook at, and two seats, and a few pots and pans, packed so as neither to rattle nor to break; and you should lead the horse and crack a whip now and then, and I would sell our wares as we went along, to the folk who lived in out-of-the-way cottages and seldom went to town. And for dinner we would buy some meat, and when we had cooked it we would eat it in our little house, looking out at the sweet country-side the while; and at night we would draw up under a tree, and sleep soundly till the birds called us in the morning. It would be a glorious life, with no bills and no best clothes, and few amenities.'

'Pleasant enough,' said Arthur, thoughtfully; 'but I think it would be a better thing to be a

bargee—to sit all day long at the end of a barge, smoking a short pipe and swearing at the boy on the towing-path.'

'But where should I be?'

'You should crouch down beside me, my darling,' he answered. 'You would like that?'

'Oh, yes. I should hear so many wicked words; it would be delightful.'

'The worst of it is,' he went on, with a sigh, 'that the spread of science and education together will, I fear, do away with the barge and the boy, perhaps even with the swearing.'

I think of this merry talk now sadly enough, sitting alone with the vagabond longings rising up within me. But I must go upstairs and see my little one. It is never possible to stay away from her long.

She is in the nursery, sitting quite still, with an open picture-book in her lap, watching Jack, who is on the rocking-horse, singing as he rocks to and fro, and sharpening a pencil at the same time; the rein is twisted round his left hand.

'Molly doesn't care a bit about anything, mother,' he says, 'so I am singing to her.'

So sweet a little voice has Jack; we always like to listen to him, and to look at his pretty round face while he sings.

'I am tired, mammy,' Molly says; and, getting

up, she clings to me and puts her head on my shoulder.

'My poor little darling,' I say, and she nestles down close in my arms. 'Do you know, my children,' I tell them suddenly, 'that you are going into a strange country soon?' My heart fails me as I think of the money: but the children are listening eagerly, so I go on without flinching. 'Into a strange country, where it will be beautifully sunny and warm all through the winter.'

'Perhaps we shall be able to pick flowers?' Molly says dreamily.

'Will there be any robbers or wild beasts?' Jack asks in the tone of one prepared to fight a legion.

CHAPTER II.

I HAVE been trying to rest a little, lying on the sofa in my own room; but it is no good, my brain is in a whirl still. The nursery tea went up just now; it must be nearly five o'clock. Even a few minutes' sleep would help me to think better; but as it is I am dazed and useless.

The servant enters with a card. 'Mr. Cohen, ma'am, and he hopes you'll be able to see him.'

I would give the world not to do so, but cannot well refuse. He is an old friend and knew my husband well, and has been good-natured, and made people send their children to have their portraits painted in the days when commissions were few and far between. So I get up and smooth my hair and look at myself in the wardrobe glass, for I am glad to do anything or think of anything save Molly, and yet she is not for a single moment out of my thoughts. And so I stand and look at myself in the glass. I was always slight and pale, but lately I have grown terribly thin and tired-looking, and there are black rings under my eyes that make me

look ill. The only beauty left me is my hair. I have quantities of soft light hair. I hardly know what to do with it, and twist it round my head, and flatten it down, and vainly try to make it look prim and neat.

As I pass the nursery door I listen for a moment to the voices within. Jack is talking, but suddenly stops—to eat bread and jam, perhaps—and then Molly says, 'Go on, Jack; do go on,' in an eager voice.

'All right; wait a bit.'

Molly may be too excited by Jack's conversation to eat, I think, so I put my head in at the door, and seeing that her face is hidden in her mug of milk, am satisfied. For a moment everything swims. It is probably the worry of this strange day. And then I go downstairs to my visitor.

Mr. Cohen is a Jew, and never hesitates to proclaim it. The Jews are the finest people in the world, he says, and the oldest. Adam was a Jew; and when you talk to him about evolution, he says that if the theory is true, then the first man worthy of the name who was evolved was a Jew, and that the last man left in possession, when all the rest have died off, will be a Jew, and a triumphant proof of the survival of the fittest. 'It is the best thing on earth to be a Jew, and the wisest to be proud of it,' he said once, in my hearing, to some one who

was a little inclined to 'chaff' him. So the chaff came to an untimely end, and he remained unruffled, conscious of having the best of it. He is a tall, dark young man, not very young, but by courtesy is called so, for he goes to dances, and is unmarried. He is like a sardine to look at; so very like a sardine—long and dark, and lank and oily. I feel convinced that he sleeps in a tin box; there seems to be always a faint odour of spice about him. He is very rich, and knows it; you are constantly made aware that he knows it; yet he is good-hearted, pleased with himself and the world in general—a man who has never known worry, and never will know it. He is blessed with no strong feelings: has never been deeply in love, and never will be; thinks marriage would be a bore; and that 'if anything does happen, and any one belonging to one chumps up, you know, why, it can't be helped; one must just put up with it.' 'Chumps up' means dies.

I feel cold and stiff and disagreeable as I enter. Perhaps he'll ask after Molly. I could not bear to tell him that she is ill. He would say, 'What a bore. It's to be hoped she won't chump up,' and laugh. His mother died two years ago. He told me of it, and laughed a little then. Perhaps it was only nervousness, for he had been a good kind son. If he laughed about Molly, I would never speak to him

again; but I will take care not to mention the children. He comes eagerly forward to meet me as I enter, and shakes my hand quickly, as if he were in a hurry.

'How do you do?' he says. 'Why, you don't look up to much. Aren't you well?'

'Oh yes, thank you; I am quite well,' I answer. 'How are you?' and I sit down, and try to look interested in what he will say; but everything seems changed, and I am consciously acting a part.

'I know all about it,' he says, as he takes the chair opposite to me. 'You are bothered about the young 'un. Been to a wedding, and met Mrs. Marshall as I was coming away, and she told me you were up a tree, so I thought I'd come round.'

He says it in the most cheerful tone, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for one's child to be ill, and for oneself to be up a tree, as he calls it. I am vexed with Mrs. Marshall for telling him, only I wonder that she remembered to do so, for she is childless herself, and never seems to care for children.

'I am awfully sorry for you,' the sardine goes on. I always call him the sardine in my thoughts.

'I know you are, of course,' I answer gently; 'but don't let us talk about it.'

'What are you going to do?' he asks, taking no notice of my request.

'Going abroad.'

'Awful bore that; interfere with your work, and cost a lot.'

'Yes, I suppose it will,' I answer, trying to speak cheerfully and feeling that it is a dismal failure. 'But one must not think of that when one's child is in danger.'

'No, of course not,' he says, looking vacantly into space. Evidently he is not much concerned; but why on earth should he be? We are nothing to him. 'Been busy lately?' he asks.

'Yes, pretty well,' I answer, supposing that he has tired of the other subject already. 'Tell me what you have been doing,' I add, determined to talk of other things.

'Not much,' he says absently. 'Nothing going on just now.'

'You have been to a wedding?' Perhaps he would like to talk about that, I think.

'Yes.' Evidently he doesn't care about it. He is very absent to-day.

'A pretty bride?' I ask the question mechanically, just to fill up the time. If I could only get away to Molly!

'Yes; nothing out of the way. Bridegroom twenty years older—selfish beggar. Never saw him before, and didn't think much of him.'

'But how do you know that he is selfish?'

'Always think a man is selfish who marries any one a lot younger than himself.'

'But why?'

'Well, you see, he condemns the woman who cares about him to certain widowhood—that is, in the natural course of things. If she doesn't care about him, he is the means of making her look forward to a good time coming when he will be out of the way and she will have the cash-box to herself, and that sort of thing spoils any woman's nature.'

'Why, of course,' I answer, beginning to be interested. 'But they may care for each other very much, so much that for the sake of the present happiness she is willing to risk his dying first. After all, people don't always die in the order of their ages.'

But the sardine is a man who thinks that if he has convictions it is his duty to stand by them, so he shakes his head.

'Don't believe in it,' he says. 'Not the kind of love that should be between husband and wife—can't be real chums and companions, and that sort of thing; they are on such different platforms, you know.'

I can hardly believe that he has been thinking this out for himself.

'But surely——' I begin, and stop with a gasp, for suddenly there comes the pain that has so often worried me lately; it takes away my breath and

makes me feel cold and sick for a minute or two, and then leaves a dull sense of misery and weakness behind it. 'But surely companionship——' and I am forced to stop again. If it gets worse I must speak to a doctor; but I am always ashamed to complain of my own aches and pains, and my heart is so full of memories and the children and of work, that I forget them unless they are actually on me. I sometimes think that people who have a great deal to do, and who have known much sorrow, are just a little beyond physical pain—a little farther away from it than others, as they are from little sorrows. Given the strong motive, tell me that at the other end I should meet my dear ones once again, and I could walk through hell's flames without flinching; nay, should almost find the burning sweet, as, let us hope, the martyrs did of old, because of the great happiness awaiting them at the end.

'I say!' the sardine exclaims. 'You don't look well; lips as white as chalk. What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' I answer. 'Go on; the wedding ——' but I feel the pain in an odd muffled way, as if it were wrapped in something, or had gone a little way off; and then I am conscious of looking at a little table opposite. 'Go on; the wedding ——' I hear myself saying as I might hear another person speak, and all things come forward and slip

past me or under my feet, and something tight is round my heart—Molly. . . .

When I come to, Mr. Cohen is sitting by the sofa on which I am lying, a white pillow is under my head, a smelling-bottle on the little table.

'What is the matter?' I ask.

'Had a faint, that's all,' he answers. 'Do you often do that?'

'Why, no,' I answer, in surprise. 'I never had one before that I remember.'

'Well, you had better take care of yourself as well as of the young 'un, or you'll chump up.'

'That would be a bore,' I say, getting up from the sofa and trying to answer him in his own key, for I remember everything now.

'Awful bore,' he says thoughtfully. 'Who'd look after the young 'uns?'

And then suddenly I disgrace myself, for, without any seeming rhyme or reason, I feel a choking in my throat, and the hot tears in my eyes, and before I know anything more I am crying, there straight before him. I get back my self-control in a minute or two, and manage to laugh in what I hope is a merry, careless fashion. The poor sardine is evidently sorely puzzled what to do.

'I am very stupid,' I say; 'but indeed I can't help it.'

'Oh no, you are not stupid,' he says, in a kind,

consoling voice, as if he did not exactly think that of me. 'But don't cry; it's no good crying, you know.'

'Oh no, it's no good crying,' I echo.

'Of course you are not really going to chump up.'

'It would be a good thing and real economy,' I say, 'if every family did its dying all at once. If we three, all at the same moment, could creep into a cozy grave, I should be thankful and glad. Oh, I should be so glad that I believe I could get up and waltz with the tombstone.'

'That would be a lark,' he answers, evidently thinking of something else. Then he looks at his watch, and I wonder how long he has been here.

'I am afraid my fainting has prevented you from keeping some engagement,' I say.

'Lots of time,' he answers. 'I have to dine out at eight. It's not six yet; must get to the club for half an hour, though. St. John's Wood is rather out of the beaten track, you see.'

I wait a minute or two, hoping that he will get up to go, but he makes no sign. Then I wonder if he would like some tea. It would prolong his visit, but this tiresome time must have fatigued him.

'We might have some tea,' I say, perhaps not too cordially and longing to be alone.

'That's an idea,' he answers, with an air of relief; 'I'll ring.'

So the tea-things are brought in, and I make an effort to be cheerful and not to think of Molly, and to take no notice of the aching that is still going on in a dull, methodical way. While I make tea the sardine walks about the room and looks at the paintings and the odds and ends of china.

'That picture of Grove's isn't up to much,' he says.

'I like it,' I answer.

'That's a good thing,' he says cheerfully, as if he had feared I did not. 'There's a little bit here, now, that rather takes my fancy;' and he looks at a tiny picture—a girl making lace, which an old schoolfellow gave me as a wedding gift. 'Pretty little thing,' he says, as he puts its back into its place. 'Don't suppose it's worth anything, but the idea's pretty. I rather like it.'

'Edith Clark gave it to me as a wedding present,' I say. 'It is pretty; Mr. Layton once took a great fancy to it, and offered me twenty pounds for it.'

'Why ever didn't you take it?' he asks, astonished. 'It isn't worth that; it isn't worth five, I should say.' The sardine has an idea that he knows a good deal about pictures.

'I know; but I am very fond of the girl who gave it to me. She is in India now.'

'Yes, but twenty pounds. You might have

given her half, and got her to paint another when she came back.'

'She might never come back,' I remark, as I put the water into the pot.

'Then she wouldn't know you had sold it. You'll want a lot of money to go abroad with,' he tells me again, as he drinks his tea.

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'Made up your mind where to go?'

'Not yet, but south, of course,' I answer. 'We are to go to Dr. Finch again, and he will tell us.'

'You know, a winter abroad costs an awful lot,' he says, in the tone of a man who knows all about it; 'and one must do things comfortably, especially with an invalid. It runs into a lot of money.'

'Of course it does,' I say cheerfully, as if I do not mind in the least.

He gets up and walks uneasily about the room again, and suddenly sits down on a chair rather nearer to me than before, and begins in an awkward manner to hug his knee. Then he gets up and walks about again, and I notice that his face is a little flushed this last minute or two.

'Look here,' he begins, clearing his throat, 'you mustn't mind what I am going to say, Mrs. Keith. The fact is, I am awfully sorry for you about the young 'un. It does seem hard lines when you have just got things straight a bit. It struck me that

this might have come rather suddenly, and I know going away will cost a lot; it always does. I'm an old traveller and know all about it, you see.'

'Yes?'

'Well, you are not rich, and I am, though it doesn't do to own it always,' he adds cautiously; 'but I am, and I have no one loafing about and hanging on to me, and I wish you would let me be of some service to you——'

'Oh, no, no,' I begin. There is that in his tone and manner which makes it impossible to take offence, or to be anything but very grateful to him. I look up thankfully enough at the sardine, and feel what a good fellow he is, but I am not going to take his money.

'Why not?' he pleads. 'My sisters are rich, but I am only saying to you what I should say to them if they were not. I am so sorry for you; it is very hard lines that this should come. It would do me lots of good, and make me awfully grateful if you'd—if you'd let me pay say four or five hundred pounds into your bankers, and you'd slide through the winter all right then.'

Four or five hundred pounds!

'But, Mr. Cohen, I couldn't——' I begin gratefully enough; but he interrupts me, and hurries on.

'I don't mean as a loan; that would only ham-

per you—unless, of course, you would rather have it that way. I mean just as you accept it from your brother, or your sister, or a relation of any sort;' and he tries to laugh. 'I never do much good, but if I helped to get your little chick right, I should feel set up in virtue for a long time to come.'

'Oh, but I can't!' I cry, feeling that this money must be refused, though where else it will come from I cannot tell. 'I am very grateful and will never forget your kindness, but I cannot accept it.'

'Why not?' he asks, with a calm air of wonder, and there is an expression on his face that shows how hurt he is, and how vexed.

'I don't know,' I falter, for it is all so sudden, and I have no reasons ready to hand. 'I can't tell you. I never took money from any one except Uncle Clement. It seems like a confession of failure to take it. Of course it will be very difficult to manage this going. I don't know yet how it will be managed; but please don't——' My tears begin to come again, and will not be stopped.

He waits for a minute or two, then gets up. 'Well, look here,' he says, 'if you will, there it is. Think it over. If you like to pay me back, or to work it off in commissions when you come home, you can. Don't let the young 'un chump up for want of anything that's to be had for the asking.'

'Oh no; I would beg first.'

'You had better come to me before begging. After all, it is nothing to make a fuss about. I shouldn't miss it, you know; why, I should forget all about it in a fortnight.' And he wrings my hand, and in another five minutes has gone.

The sardine's visit leaves me face to face with the money question. I stare blankly round the room, and a little shudder seems to overtake me as I wonder what I shall do. I have refused help from the only person who is likely to give it. I have nothing in hand or to come beyond the few pounds in the house and the fifty pounds which will be due at Christmas, and out of that there are payments to make. There are a few pictures which might be sold to dealers; but they are not worth much, and they were gifts, and I should be sorry to part from them. We have no trinkets; nothing of any sort worth selling. We have no relations save a few cousins, and of these I know only one, and know her but slightly. There is no time to work before the date at which Dr. Finch says we should start, and yet we must go; it is not a case of 'if' and 'perhaps,' but one of 'must.' This house may let, but it is very tiny, and would only suffice for one or two people; and though it is pretty, very pretty and artistic, yet many things which we are able to do without would have to be bought for a tenant, and

at best it would not let for much. Oh, Molly, I wonder how it will all end. I go and look at the picture, and wonder vaguely, as I have wondered half insanely many times before, if the people who sleep in the little churchyard sorrowed much, and if the people who are coming to the garden, the people who will gather the flowers and laugh beneath the blue sky, will be happy long. Happiness always seems to me to be like a traveller passing by, staying, perhaps, a little while here and a little while there, but having no abiding-place. Molly—— But I am very tired. Perhaps things will be clearer in the morning. I will creep upstairs and have a long sleep, with my little one in my arms.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning light has brought me to my senses. Last night I thought we had no money beyond what I have stated; this morning, with the sunshine coming into my room, and Molly asleep beside me, like a flash of lightning the remembrance of the hundred a year Uncle Clement left us came to me. It is in the hands of trustees; but of course they will advance sufficient to take Molly abroad when they are told that it is a matter of life and death; it is only what Uncle Clement would have wished. We shall be able to repay what we borrow; and as I am making more every year, the debt will not make much difference in our income. We shall not want a very large sum. Four or five hundred would be absurd; but perhaps we had better have two hundred, as there will be four of us, including nurse. We can bring back what we do not spend. Then, if this house does not let, we shall be safe; but the house must be let somehow. I turn and look at Molly. Her face is very thin, but in the sunshine I feel so strong myself it seems as if my

strength is enough to save her, and in the south she will be able to run about all day, or to lie still in the sweet soft air and watch Jack. She is certain to get well; she must, she shall. Perhaps Dr. Finch took an overgloomy view of things. He is a rather gloomy man.

This very morning I will go to the trustees, and then that matter will be settled. After wondering whether it would be better to go to Mr. Beccles or to Colonel Anson, I decide upon the former. So I get ready quickly, and half an hour after breakfast sally forth. It is a long way from St. John's Wood to Chancery Lane, but I walk more than half the distance considering what to say. My heart sinks a little as at last I mount the stairs leading to the lawyer's office; my voice trembles when I ask for Mr. Beccles.

'He is out of town till to-morrow night,' the clerk tells me. 'He will be here again on Thursday,' and to-day is Tuesday.

'I will come again on Thursday morning,' I say, and turn wearily homewards.

It is twelve o'clock when I get back, perhaps later. The house is all in a commotion. Two hours ago nurse was sent for by her married daughter at Kingsland. She is very ill. They are afraid that it is scarlet fever, and nurse went off in a great state of mind. Poor nurse! it will worry her sadly, for

this is her only daughter, and all her sons are away in Germany. Nurse is a good, kind, rather stupid old soul; but I have kept her because she is so fond of us all. She has spoilt the children, and she is not a good nurse or very careful in some ways, but that has not mattered, for I look after the children so much myself, and she is so very kind to them that it has been easy to forgive her shortcomings.

But if her daughter really has scarlet fever, of course nurse will not be able to go with us, and so a new difficulty may arise. I cannot go alone with two children, for one may possibly want all my time, and it will be vexing to take a stranger. But, after all, this is a minor trouble, and will arrange itself, no doubt. There is the money to get, and packing to do, and getting ready in all ways to flit for six months. It is no good to sit and dream.

In the afternoon I go upstairs, and begin turning out. Poor old nurse, who no doubt is anxious enough, will probably want some of her clothes. I will pack them, and send them to her if she is not back by seven to-night; for if it is safe to come, she will certainly be here in time to put the children to bed. Suddenly it strikes me that there are some things in the cupboard that might be useful to her, for the daughter is very poor. In the medicine cupboard, too, there is some eau-de-cologne. I get out the eau-de-cologne and look in at my little store of

odds and ends. Some of these simple drugs must go to the south with us, and this bottle of chloroform for my neuralgia. Sometimes, when the pain is very worrying, I use a little of it until, dazed and stupid, I drop off to sleep; but I have had to be careful lately, for I fancied it affected my heart. I must get some more medicines to take abroad, foreign drugs are seldom good. So many things there are to buy, and Molly shall have a little travelling-cloak, and a hood for her golden head; and Jack, too, must be made smart. They are pretty children; people are sure to admire them. I have found all the things nurse may want, and will pack them. Then my eye catches the bottle of chloroform again. It must on no account be left behind. There is always a difficulty in buying it, and something, I do not know what, makes me treasure up this bottle, in its olive wood case, very carefully.

That dear little rascal Jack is singing at the top of his voice; but what is Molly doing? I go into the nursery, and find him on the rocking-horse, his head thrown back, his face aglow with excitement, shouting with all his might—

> 'A ship, a ship a-sailing, a-sailing on the sea,
> And it is deeply laden with pretty things for me.'

Molly is sitting in the armchair, watching her brother with the deepest admiration. She is always content

to watch Jack, and to listen while he sings, but she never offers to join in any game. She is too glad to rest is little Molly.

'Don't make so much noise, my sonnie,' I say; 'you will give Molly a headache.'

'Oh, no, mother,' Molly says, with a long drawn-out sigh of satisfaction. 'I do so like to hear him. Go on, Jack;' and seeing that they are happy together, I leave them, while my bonnie boy's voice rings out joyfully—

'The four-and-twenty sailors who walk about the decks
Are four-and-twenty white mice with chains about their necks.

And while I am busy in my own room, the door opens, and there is nurse.

'Nurse!' I exclaim. 'I am so glad to see you. Is your daughter well, then?'

The poor soul's eyes fill with tears. 'No, ma'am; she is very bad,' she answers.

Then a terror seizes me; for do we not all think of our own?

'Nurse,' I say, 'is it safe to come here? Are you sure she has not scarlet fever?'

'Yes, ma'am; it is quite safe,' she says, in surprise. 'I have not been in the room where she is for two hours. But I don't know what to do, ma'am; for they think she has got the fever, and I do want to be with her, ma'am, and I don't know what you'll do without your old nurse.'

'Oh, nurse, go!' I cry, 'and don't come here again until I give you leave. If you gave the children scarlet fever, you would never forgive yourself.'

'I am sure, ma'am, I can't,' she urges, in her broken English. 'My daughter is only just beginning, and perhaps it isn't scarlet fever, after all.'

'Nurse, pray go away,' I cry in despair. 'I know you love the children.'

'Yes, ma'am; that's why I am come, and for my things. I know you would not like me to stay away from my daughter when she is ill——'

'I am packing your clothes. Go outside and get into a cab; but no, you mustn't do that, or you will give it to some one else, perhaps. Go outside and wait, dear nurse. I will send your clothes out to you or bring them. I am so sorry for you, but you must not enter the house again until I give you leave——'

Suddenly hearing her voice, Jack runs out, and throws his arms round her neck.

'Nursee!' he exclaims. 'Hulloa, old nursee.'

'Go away!' I cry, trying to drag the child from her.

But he clings to her, and manages to climb on to her back, and, with a shout of laughter, puts his arms tighter round her neck and his little bare legs round her waist, and suddenly that awful pain comes, and

my strength fails, but only for a moment. With a great effort I force the pain back, and nurse and the child apart.

'Go away, mine dear,' she says; 'I'll be back soon again. I am sure, ma'am, it is safe. Won't you let me see Miss Molly again?' The woman must be mad, I think. She is a sturdy, kind-hearted German woman, who has never been ill and seldom out of temper in her life, and infection is a thing she looks upon as a popular delusion. 'I wouldn't do her any harm for the world,' she pleads; 'you know I wouldn't, ma'am.'

'Yes, I know you wouldn't,' I say; 'but for goodness' sake, dear nurse, go away!'

At last she leaves the house; and when her things are sent out to her, I rush upstairs and put Jack into a bath, and resolve that nurse shall never come back again. She is good and kind-hearted, and would give her life for the children; but she is careless, and has lived her life free of aches and pains, and is a little sceptical of danger for others.

When Jack is rubbed and scrubbed and in fresh clothes, I laugh at my own fears and violence, for he must be safe now, and I go downstairs exhausted, and lie still upon the sofa for a little while. And then a bruise, which is oddly painful, and was done

by a pole when we were getting the studio ready for my 'at home,' sets me suddenly thinking of some absurd troubles of my childhood. There was a little boy who used to come and stay next door to my father's house when I was a child, and he and I were playfellows. We were fond of each other, but we had terrible quarrels, and my arms were black and blue with the pinches he gave me, for my skin easily discolours. Then, when he found that the marks of his cruelty showed, he took to pinching my legs, so that I bitterly regretted having arrived at the age of stockings. Never did any one or anything pinch as he did, and yet we liked each other; and when at last he went away, I got up at six in the morning to say good-bye to him, and clambered up on the fence so that he might lean over and give me a parting kiss. I have never seen Ralph Bicknell since that chilly grey morning, but I have never forgotten his pinches.

No; it will never do to have nurse back, but some one else must be found at once to take her place. I will write to Mrs. Marshall, and ask if she knows of any one likely to do. On 'Show Sunday' I heard her talking to a friend about some girl in whom she was interested. It vexed me at the time, for she seemed to care more for the girl than for the pictures, she hardly looked at the latter, and forgot to say anything about them. That is a long while

ago, but still she may know of some one. We must have a new nurse at once, for Jack is brimful of mischief and must be looked after, and there are many things to do. So the note is written and sent off at once.

CHAPTER IV.

We have just finished breakfast. Mrs. Marshall only had my note last night, but she has come already, and is waiting in the drawing-room to see me. Probably she knows of some one likely to do as a nurse.

'I have had your note, and thought I had better come and see what could be done.'

She says it grimly, as if she had resented my writing to her, but thought it her duty to help me. Her eyes look very round, her nose is very pointed, and she has brushed her grey hair back so tightly that her face looks harder than ever; her manner is cold, as it always is. I feel half afraid of her as she sits staring me in the face.

'It was a great shame to trouble you——'

'Not at all. Only, unluckily, I do not know of any one just now, but I will inquire.' There is a silence for a minute, and then she goes on—'I came to see if you would trust the children to me in the daytime, as the nurse is gone. You must have a great deal to do.'

'To you?' I say, half bewildered.

'I am very fond of children.' She says it so harshly, and looks at me with her eyes so wide open, that I am as much frightened as astonished, and forget to answer at all. 'It is a great trouble to me that I have none of my own,' she adds hurriedly; and the tears come suddenly into her eyes and trickle down her cheeks, but she does not seem to be conscious of her own distress. Hardly knowing what to do, I go a step nearer. As if she did not know it, she puts out her hand to push me back. She is a woman whom caresses rather annoy. I wonder what to say, and am afraid of saying anything.

'It is very kind——' I begin.

'Perhaps they would not like to come to me,' she says sharply; and I fear that this is the truth.

It would be a great comfort to have a free time in which to pack and get ready, but Molly will certainly never consent to go, even for a few hours. Perhaps Jack would, and Molly is always content to lie on a sofa, or to be propped up in the corner of one, and look at a picture-book.

'The children are shy,' I say hesitatingly.

'You would not be afraid to trust them to me?' she asks suspiciously.

'Oh no, no, indeed,' I answer quickly, and this is true enough. Somehow I feel, too, that if she were alone with the children she would not be

ashamed of being a little tender with them. Perhaps she is only hard and cold to grown-up folk, or chooses to pretend to be so. If we could look into people's hearts there would be a vast number of surprises for us.

'Perhaps you do not like to be without them?' she remarks, in a polite and frigid manner. 'But it might be more comfortable for them if they came to me while you are busy, and I would try to find them some amusement.'

'Oh no, no,' I answer quickly, feeling as if I had been reproved. All the time I am quite aware that I hate the thought of Molly being away all day.

'I would bring them back by four in the afternoon, and I could fetch them every morning.'

'It is very kind of you,' I begin once more, but she looks so hard I have not the courage to go on, or to say that I fear she will frighten them out of their wits. I remember Jack asking me once why she had such round eyes.

'Suppose we see what the children say to the idea?' she suggests; and they are sent for.

Molly runs up to me instantly. Jack hesitates for a moment, and then, in a business-like way, follows his sister to my side.

'Would you like to go home with me?' Mrs. Marshall asks. 'I would take you back in the

carriage, and on the way we would stop and buy some toys.'

Jack is interested, but does not move. Molly shrinks from the idea, and creeps up closer and holds me tight.

'There is a snow-white kitten at my house; don't you think you would like to come and play with it?' she adds.

'Wouldn't you, Molly darling?' I whisper; but she only shudders and clings closer.

'Oh no,' she says, shaking her head; 'can't leave mummy.'

'But Mrs. Marshall will bring you back this afternoon, my pet,' I say, meanly thankful in my heart that she will not go, for it is evident that nothing will tempt her away from me.

'Want to stay with you,' she whispers, and there is no leaving her.

Jack, however, is evidently wavering; Mrs. Marshall's gravity impresses him, he feels that what she says may be depended on. He rubs his round, rosy cheek against mine, and says condescendingly—

'I don't mind going for a little while, but I shall want to come back to mother soon."

It is a great relief. It had seemed so ungracious to refuse her kindness altogether. Mrs. Marshall tries to follow up her advantage.

'And won't you come too, if Jack does?' she asks Molly. But Molly only shakes her head again, and stands by me stoutly. 'Perhaps Jack would like to go to the Zoo, then, if Molly won't come. It would have fatigued her too much.'

'I should like to go to the Zoo,' Jack says, the delights of dissipation opening out before him.

'Perhaps he will stay a few days and be content,' Mrs. Marshall suggests, when Jack has gone to be made ready. 'There is a little room he can sleep in next to mine. I will telegraph if he is quite happy at the thought of staying. In two or three days you may have found a nurse.'

So Jack goes off with Mrs. Marshall. He looks so pretty as he starts. He wears his little velvet suit, and, fearing lest he should feel chilly in an open carriage, Mrs. Marshall ties a blue silk handkerchief round his throat. 'I brought it for Molly, thinking it would suit her,' she says, in an apologetic voice. It suits Jack too, and my heart swells with pride as I look at him. He throws his arms round my neck, and then round Molly's, who has been watching him with admiration, not unmixed with awe, and then he runs gaily down the steps. He turns and shouts to me—

'Mummy dear, let Molly have my best paint-box, if she likes. She won't hurt it. Give her a

good big painting rag, and tell her to wash the brushes well.'

Unselfish little Jack, with the dash of practical common sense in him! Mrs. Marshall gets into the carriage after him, and waves her hand to me. There is a smile upon her face; she looks almost happy.

'Ah, poor dear,' I think, as I watch them out of sight; 'there was a mother's love in your heart, and never a little one came to fetch it.'

Then I go into the house and shut the door. It is very quiet without Jack. I realise that instantly, though Jack is not always in the house, nor always making a noise. How odd and still the place seems; Molly and I look at each other, and I know that we both feel lonely.

'Come and kiss me, mother,' she says, and she clings to me, whispering, 'You'll let me be with you all day, won't you?'

I take her in my arms and sit down with her, trying to clear my head of cobwebs, and to think over an idea that came to me this morning. When I said that we had no relations I meant that we had no near or intimate ones. We have some cousins, but, with one exception, I do not even know their addresses, and have never beheld them. The exception lives in London; she is married and well off. We used to know each other a little years ago; she

sometimes went to see my father, but after he died we ceased to meet. She seemed to resent my marriage, because it was not a good one from a worldly point of view. The idea that has presented itself is that, after all, I will tell Alice Grey (what a pretty name it is) of the trouble that has come upon me. She is my cousin; why should I feel so certain of her want of sympathy?

'Molly, would you like to go out with mother?' I ask. She brightens at the words; so half an hour later we are looking our best, as folk who go to see their grand relations should; and drive in a hansom to Harley Street. Mrs. Grey is at home; we are shown into the drawing-room, and sit waiting for her, trying to forget that we are uncertain of our welcome. Oh dear, I think, as I look round at all the handsome things in the room, if these things were only ours, or even half of them were ours, I would sell them; then there would be no more difficulty about the money, and we would start on our journey south to-morrow.

'How do you do, Margaret?' Mrs. Grey says, and shakes hands, and very formally kisses me. 'How do you do, dear?' to Molly, and she pats her cheek and sits down. We talk a little formal talk, and a quarter of an hour passes, and Mrs. Grey looks a little bored. I ask to see her children, and two pretty, well-behaved mites are brought in. As

they leave the room, I ask if Molly may go back to the nursery for ten minutes. It is odd that she has not noticed that Molly looks ill. 'Oh yes,' she says, 'Molly shall go to the nursery for ten minutes; and then I must send you away,' she adds, 'for I have some people coming to luncheon.'

'Oh yes, we must go,' I answer. 'I have a great deal to do. I came to tell you,' I say, when Molly has gone, 'that Dr. Finch says Molly must winter abroad. She is very delicate—very; she is threatened with—with what killed dear mother.' It is said calmly, thank goodness.

'How very trying,' she says.

'Yes, it is very trying,' I say drearily.

'I am sure it is,' she answers.

'If Arthur had been alive——' I begin vaguely, not knowing how to go on.

'It was a pity that your marriage turned out so badly,' she says, in a sympathetic voice.

'It did not turn out badly,' I say, lifting up my head. 'If Arthur had lived he would have been a great artist; there was the making of one in him.'

'And of course you would have been very badly off if you had remained single, for poor Uncle Robert's pension died with him.'

'I had other offers besides dear Arthur's,' I say, rather indignantly, and not from any wish to boast, but because it seems rather insulting to Arthur to

suppose that he married a girl no one else could have cared about, and to me to suppose that I married him for any reason except the right one. 'I married him because we loved each other, and money isn't everything.' I am getting incoherent, but it does not matter.

'What I mean is, that I always think it is a pity to marry a man who has nothing to settle on you,' she explains, as if she were in the habit of marrying at least once a year herself, and knew all about it. 'Then, too,' she continues, 'I think it is a pity to marry a man who has no relations. If anything happens they are bound to look after you, to a certain extent.'

'Not more than one's own relations, surely?' I say, rather astonished at the business-like eyes with which she looks at marriage all round.

'Oh yes, dear,' she answers sweetly and softly. 'When a woman marries, she belongs to her husband and to his people a great deal more than to any one else. I always feel that; indeed, I feel it so strongly that I consider myself bound to do a great deal more for my husband's family than for any member of my own. But tell me, where are you going?' she says suddenly, thinking, perhaps, that she has given me a hint that may prevent possible trouble for the future.

'I don't know,' I answer; 'it is not settled.'

'Of course, most people go to the Riviera; but it is fashionable and expensive.'

'And we should be out of place among fashionable people.'

'Yes, dear,' she says compassionately, as if we were beggars, and went about in rags and tags, with packs on our backs. For some unknown reason, Alice Grey is making me angry.

'Malaga is a good place, I am told,' she says, much more pleasantly, as if to make amends. 'The Vincents are going to winter there this year. Some friends of theirs rave about it, and say it is the best climate in Europe. That might do for you, Margaret; Spain would be an interesting country to see.'

'It is a long way off.'

'And for that reason it may be cheap.'

There is something in that, and I should like to see Spain.

'I wonder if many English go there?'

'It is a health-place, so probably they do.'

'I want to paint some portraits, if possible, while we are away; it would help with expenses. I fear I should not get much to do at Malaga.'

'It is impossible to say, of course;' and her voice is a shade more distant. I understand why: she is determined to have nothing to do with our arrangements. Perhaps she is afraid of my trying to borrow, so I promptly relieve her mind.

'It is a great comfort that Uncle Clement left us some money, or wintering abroad would have been impossible.'

'Of course it would,' she answers cordially. She is evidently a good deal relieved. 'Perhaps,' she adds graciously, 'if you do go to Malaga, you might like to know the Vincents. They are very pleasant people. And, by the way, I think you used to know Ralph Bicknell very well. You and he were children together, were you not?'

'Oh yes, we knew each other very well,' I answer, and straightway think of his pinches. 'What about him?'

'He is always supposed to be sweet on May Vincent, if he is ever sweet on any one except himself; but, as it has been going on for a long time, and nothing has come of it yet, it is probably all nonsense.'

'What is he like?' I ask.

'Oh, he is rather good-looking, and—and——'

'Conceited?' I suggest, thinking of her previous remark.

'No, not exactly; but he rather gives himself airs, as if he thought himself an important person, and he is very fond of snubbing people.'

The description makes me laugh. It is just what Ralph used to be, and yet there was a fascination about him. I wonder if it exists still.

'I should like to see him again,' I say curiously. 'It is so odd to hear of him after all these years.'

'Well, probably you will see him if you go to Malaga, for I heard that he was going there with the Vincents. I suppose they like him. I think he is a very disagreeable person myself, and I believe he dislikes me. Luckily, tastes differ. But I am afraid I must send you away, Margaret,' she says, in an apologetic tone, and looking at her watch. 'If you do go to Malaga, and come across the Vincents, remember me to them. Good-bye, dear.' She kisses Molly, who has been sent for, and kisses me, and forgets to say that she hopes it will do Molly good to winter south—forgets everything, except that she is very anxious to get rid of us.

CHAPTER V.

EVERYTHING looks so bright and hopeful this morning that even the remembrance of our visit to Alice Grey only amuses me. Last evening Molly sat on my lap till long after her bed-time, listening while I sang to her and thought the while of my own mother, who sang to me long years ago, and now is sleeping far away in the country churchyard. Molly, my little child, I wonder if you in your turn will some day sit and sing to your little ones when I too am taking my rest? There is nothing on this green earth left that could make me so happy as to know that. While I was still singing, a note came from Mrs. Marshall, following up the telegram she had sent earlier, saying that Jack was so happy that she had kept him. He had been to the Zoo, and to-morrow was going to Richmond with her; the drive would do him good, and he would enjoy the run over the green in the park. Of course he will, dear little Jack; and how rosy he will look, running about under the trees. It is very kind of Mrs. Marshall to keep him, especially

as no new nurse has appeared. Nurse's daughter has scarlet fever, and has it very badly, poor girl. The landlady of the house had had it and concealed it. What a wicked thing to do, and what a narrow escape Jack has had!

This morning I am going to take Molly again to Dr. Finch, and afterwards mean to go to Chancery Lane, to get over my interview with Mr. Beccles. I am very cheerful about both visits. Molly looks so much better, perhaps Dr. Finch will say there is no necessity to go abroad, after all.

This hope is soon dashed to the ground. The great doctor examines her very carefully, and sits watching me while I put on her wraps afterwards. He waits till she has gone home with the housemaid before he speaks.

'Do you think you really can manage to take her away for the winter, Mrs. Keith?' He puts the question in this considerate form, for he knows my position and circumstances.

'Yes, I can manage it, if it is necessary,' I answer resolutely, determined that nothing shall stand in the way, if going is likely to make her well.

'It *is* necessary. It may save her; but remember, I don't say that it will,' he says gently.

'Is she so very ill?' I ask. My heart seems to be getting stone cold, but my voice is firm.

'She is in a very critical condition. It is possible that change of climate may save her. I have more faith in that than in anything else.'

'Where shall we go?'

'Have you any friends in the south of France whom you could be near?'

'No, none,' I answer. 'I have heard of some people, friends of a cousin's, going to Malaga. Would that do?'

'Excellent. It is one of the best climates in Europe, and there is a good English doctor there. Let me see, what is he called? Murray—Dr. Murray. I should not have sent you so far, but you could not go to a better place.'

'Then we will go there;' and I get up.

'Take heart,' he says kindly, 'and try to make up your mind that she will get well, for that is something towards it.'

I look up at him and try to speak, but my lips seem to have lost their power. We shake hands, and frozen and dazed and strange, I start for Chancery Lane. How odd it is! I am like another person again, carrying my old self about like a puppet. It is very interesting to look on at all that she does, and so very strange.

It is twelve o'clock when I get to the lawyer's office. He is engaged, but will see me if I wait for

half an hour. So I wait, while my courage ebbs away behind the advertisement sheet of the *Times*, and the clerks scratch away at their desks. Perhaps it is the squeaking of their quills that affects my nerves, or the naked ugliness of the room, or the row of tin boxes on the shelves opposite, with the owners' names painted on them in hard white letters; I don't know, but when I enter the room consecrated to Mr. Beccles and private interviews, I can scarcely drag one foot after the other.

'How do you do, Mrs. Keith; how do you do? Sit down;' and he looks at me inquiringly.

'How do you do?' and I sit down. 'I came to see you the other day, but you were away.' There is no object in telling him this, except to gain time.

'I am so sorry; it was a long way to come. I trust it was not anything very important, my dear lady?'

He is always gentle and sympathetic, but under the gentle, sympathetic manner one feels that he is cold and hard. It is like a stone wall covered by a coating of soft green moss.

'It was not pressing for the moment, but I am much relieved to see you to-day.' There is a lump coming in my throat; suppose, after all, he refuses to let us have the money? but he cannot; it is ours. 'I have come to see you on business,' I begin rather

tamely, and he bows. 'My little girl is ill—she is very ill. She is threatened by the same disease that killed my mother'—the tears are coming into my eyes, but I force them back—'and——' I can't go on.

'She'll outgrow it, my dear lady, depend upon it,' he answers feelingly. 'So young a child.'

'I hope so,' I say hopelessly; 'but the doctor—Dr. Finch, you know; I have been to him—says that she must go to a warm climate for the winter; that it is her only chance, in fact.' I stop for a moment, but he is silent. 'And so I want to raise the money to go.' He bows, but does not look encouraging. 'And as you are one of my trustees, I have come to ask you—' oh, how the words stick in my throat,—'to—let us have two hundred pounds of the money Uncle Clement left us, or we shall not be able to manage it. I suppose you will not mind?'

'I don't quite understand,' he says; and I explain. 'But the trustees have no power to advance it; it is tied up,' he says. 'It is quite out of our power.'

'Out of your power?'

'Quite out of our power. The money is settled upon you for life, only the interest is yours. At your death the capital will be your son's. You can't touch your son's property; it would not be legal.'

'But you know that, under the circumstances, Uncle Clement would have wished it; and when my

son is a man he will hate to think that this money could not be used even to save his sister's life.'

'Ah yes, my dear lady; but we have to abide by the law, which often runs counter to matters of feeling.'

'Then that is hopeless,' I say despairingly. 'I see what you mean, but it never struck me before.'

'So few ladies know anything about legal matters,' he says benevolently.

I sit still for a moment, turning over in my mind every possible way of getting the money. It is no use selling the things at home; they certainly would not realise fifty pounds. Suddenly an idea strikes me.

'Would not some one advance us two years' income? If I could borrow the two hundred pounds, paying back a hundred this year and a hundred next year, and the interest the third year'—somehow the arrangement with the interest in the tail sounds a little lame, but it would surely be a very safe arrangement, and Mr. Beccles himself, as trustee, would be able to ensure repayment—'we could borrow it on those terms, perhaps?'

'I think not,' he says sadly, shaking his head. 'You must forgive my saying it,' he goes on, 'but I do not believe in going abroad. It is a new-fangled idea, this chasing people out of their own country. If your child is well enough to recover, take care of

her, and she will do so at home. If she is unhappily too far gone to get well here, she will not do so in a foreign land.'

There is some common sense in what he says; but for all that, he is no more an authority on medical matters than Dr. Finch is on legal ones. I have had the best advice for Molly, and am bound to follow it, and I struggle hard to answer back in a practical tone, and from the common-sense point of view also.

'But whatever even I may think about the matter myself, Mr. Beccles, a great doctor has said that taking her abroad may save her, and I am bound to try it.'

He gives his shoulders a little shrug, and says nothing.

'And you think no one—no one would lend us the money?'

'I fear not,' he says, as though it grieved him sorely to say it.

'Not if the hundred a year were devoted to repaying it. I could do with even less than two hundred, I dare say.'

'I fear not,' he repeats, in the same compassionate voice. 'It is not as if the money were absolutely your own.'

Then I give up hope as far as he is concerned, and get up heartsick and indignant, for Mr. Beccles

is very rich, and I think of his grand house and the servants and carriages, and the thousand pounds Uncle Clement left him, and the life-long friendship he had shown him. To Mr. Beccles two hundred pounds would not have been a large sum to help the niece of his old friend to borrow. But what is the use of all this bitterness? I will go back to Molly.

'The world is very selfish,' I say sadly.

'It is indeed,' he answers with a sigh, as though he and the world were far, far apart.

Suddenly something prompts me to ask, 'What will become of the money Uncle Clement left if my son dies under age?'

'It would still, of course, be yours for life, and you would have the disposal of half the capital at your death.'

'And if both children die before or after me, but yet under age, what then?'

'The whole of it would go at your death as you by will direct. You ought to make a will, Mrs. Keith, in case both the children die under age, and yet survive you. It might save complications hereafter.'

'Thank you,' I say, and remember with a thankful heart that my little son is strong and healthy enough. I wish there was some provision for Molly, but I am not likely to die, and am glad enough to work. It seems to me, as I walk back down Chancery

Lane, that the only hopeless foe in the world is Death. Sorrow, and sickness, and poverty, and change, and even sin—all these things may cost us bitterest pain, but at least they can be fought, and round any corner of even the darkest road hope may be lurking or some surprise awaiting us. But Death! Never since the world began, and never to the end, will the man be found who can bring the dead to life.

I get home at last, and enter the drawing-room gently. There on the sofa, covered by an Indian blanket, her little face resting on the white pillow, is Molly. In her eyes is a burning brightness, on her cheeks are two red spots; her lips are crimson, and I know that they are burning too. She half raises her head, and all her dear face lights up.

'Oh, mother,' she says, 'I am so glad you have come back. I thought you never would. I do feel so tired; I think it was that nasty cab coming from the doctor's.

'My darling,' I say, kneeling down by the sofa.

'I wanted to be in your room, and not in the nursery, as Jack is away; so Bessie put me here. You don't mind, do you, mammy dear?'

'Mind?' I cry. 'Oh my sweet darling, my own little child!' and I smother her with wild kisses. She kisses me eagerly back for a minute, and then pushes me away—Molly, who has never before tired of being caressed.

'I can't breathe, mother dear,' she says, and pushes me still farther away.

'Lie still a little while, my darling,' I say, and stagger to the writing-table; taking a form from a drawer, I write out a telegram: '*Please come to me to-day, if possible, at any time convenient to you,*' and direct it to Frederic Cohen, Esq. I ring and send it off; and then, while the child is still watching me with her star-like eyes, I walk up and down, wondering what he will say when he gets it, and where Molly will die, and whether he spells his first name with a *k* at the end or not, and why I did not merely put the initial; and then I wonder why he is a Jew. What a fool I am, though, for what has that to do with it? and the pain threatens, but I laugh at it, and somehow it vanishes; and Molly calls to me from the sofa, and I go and put my face down on her soft hair that is the colour of sunshine—ah, God! of the sunshine that perhaps will be shining down upon her grave a few months hence. Oh, but I am going mad.

CHAPTER VI.

It is late in the afternoon when Mr. Cohen comes. I hear him drive up in a hansom, and my pulse beats quicker as he knocks at the street door. He looks particularly good-tempered and pleased as he enters; his manner is a little eager, as if he had unexpectedly gained a difficult point.

'How do you do?' he says, in his most cheerful voice. 'Had your telegram all right, you see, and am very sorry I couldn't get away before. Dreadful thing to be in the city, you know. Keeps one busy just when one wants some time to oneself.'

'It is very good of you to come at all,' I say. 'It was very cool to telegraph for you in that way.'

'It was quite right. Well?'

'Well?' I echo, for I can't speak of what I sent to tell him.

'Is it all right?'

'Is what all right?'

'Going to be sensible?' he asks, in a kind, manly fashion that reassures me and sets all my doubts at rest. I answer with a little nod, for words fail me.

He takes my hand and gives it a good shake. 'That's the best way. I knew you were a wise little woman, or I shouldn't have said anything about it. I am only treating you as I should one of my own sisters, so don't go having any more scruples, and that sort of thing. How shall we manage it? Look here, I'll pay it into your bankers if you'll tell me where. They'll think it's a commission, and the price of pictures gone up.'

Then I find a voice, and tell him of my visit to Mr. Beccles. It rather amuses him.

'Of course he couldn't advance you any money, if it is tied up on the boy,' he says; 'it would be a *felony*, or something. Fancy trying to incite a respectable lawyer to commit a felony, and get himself put into prison!'

'Then I wondered if I were to sell the things here, to help, at any rate, towards expenses,—' I begin.

'Get nothing for them, and have to start again when you come back.'

Then I explain that I am only going to borrow two hundred, and shall repay that out of the hundred a year, fifty pounds a year at least, until it is paid off; and that I am going to make a will to try and secure the money to him as far as I can in case of my death. He laughs, and seems to be vastly amused.

'All right,' he says; 'but we'll make it four hundred, and then I shall be able to dun you a little longer. You really can't do it for less; couldn't do it myself on that, and you'll have the children and maids and people.'

'I don't travel with a regular suite.'

'Don't you?' he laughs. 'Well, we'll make it four hundred. I like having my way, so that's settled. Don't let's talk of it any more. Money affairs are always awkward, you know. Are you going to give me some tea again?'

The things have been brought in, but I had forgotten all about making it.

'I am so stupid to-day,' I apologise.

'Never mind,' he says consolingly. 'Had any more faints since I was here?'

'No,' I answer, trying to laugh; for the sardine generally looks bored if one is not a little bit lively. Besides, it is a great relief to know that the money is settled. I had not realised what a load it was on my mind till my friend came and lifted it. It will not be difficult to pay it off.

'Is the young 'un getting on?' he asks.

I shake my head, and he avoids the subject.

'Made up your mind where to go?'

'We are going to Malaga.'

'That's a pretty good journey. Why, it's an awful way. What are you going to Malaga for?'

'The climate is said to be good. There is a clever English doctor; and some friends of my cousin's, Mrs. Grey, are wintering there, we may possibly know them. It will be interesting to see Spain too. I have always longed to go there.'

'Lots of beggars.'

'And grandees.'

'I never saw any grandees, and don't believe they've got any left. If they have, they keep them done up in dirty cotton-wool.'

'Why dirty cotton-wool?' I ask, in surprise.

'They have nothing clean in that country,' he says sadly, shaking his head.

'You don't seem to admire the Spaniards.'

'No, I don't. We have had some business dealings with them, and know a good deal about them. They really have got a decent climate, though—dry as a bone; for they cut down all the trees, and do away with the rainfall. You see, they don't want water in that country; they drink wine, and never wash themselves. Water is quite useless, so they have abolished it.'

'But the ground, at any rate, wants watering.'

'Not a bit of it. They don't grow anything except prickly pears. Nothing there but acres and acres of barren land. It never wants watering any more than the people.'

'It does not sound as if it will be a good place for us,' I say, in surprise.

'Oh yes, it will; it has a wonderful climate,' he remarks, drinking his tea. 'Much better than the Riviera, or any of those places. There's never any telling at what moment a wind may turn up on the Riviera and nip the life out of you. Spain is the best place this side the Mediterranean. I dare say you'll be able to do some painting there. Plenty of English—— By the way, how are you going to get there?'

'I don't know. It has only just been settled that we are to go. I have not thought about routes yet.'

'It's an awfully long journey by rail.'

'Well, we can't go by sea.'

'It would be a bore; but an idea has just struck me. You might get through very comfortably to Marseille, and go on from there by sea. Very short journey; much easier than going by rail. There are some English boats from Marseille that call at Malaga on their way home. They stop there once a week, and I could write to our people, and tell them to look after you.'

'I don't understand;' but I remember that the sardine is a merchant, and has dealings with foreign countries; the boats have probably something to do with his business. He explains.

'You see, we have branch places out in the East, and so have a considerable interest in some boats

that do our fetching and carrying between Bordeaux and places farther off. They are very comfortable, used to passengers, generally have a good many. Went in one of them myself once, so know all about it. I'll write them a line to Marseille, to say they are to look after you and take you on to Malaga—charge you nothing, of course. A clear saving that, and pleasant way of getting there.'

'It would be very nice,' I say gratefully. 'You have been a good friend to us, Mr. Cohen. What should we have done without you? I should have died, I think.'

'Well, dying wouldn't have helped much; rather the other way, in fact,' he answers. 'It's lucky I met Mrs. Marshall that day, or I shouldn't have known anything about it. That would have been very bad luck.'

'For me, yes, indeed,' I answer; for I have put all my scruples away, and, more thankful than words can tell for the sardine's generosity, give myself up to such comfort in it as I may find.

'I meant for me; wasn't thinking of you just then,' he laughs.

'Very, very much worse luck for me,' I say gaily, doing my best to be lively.

'Well, we won't nag at each other about it,' he answers.

'It seems such an amazing thing—— Oh, but I was going to say a very rude thing indeed.'

'What was it? Rather like rude things.'

'I was going to say that one does not expect a Jew to be so generous as you have been to me. He has the reputation of taking care of himself and his own people, but of being, in regard to others, very—very——'

But the sardine, who is never offended at plain speaking, answers quickly, with a certain pride of race in his voice.

'If a Jew considers himself really to be your friend and you his, then he thinks himself bound to do anything he can for you; that is, if you are up a real tree, and don't make too much fuss. A Jew hates a fuss. If you are merely in a bush, and could get out again if you liked and really tried, and are merely crying out to amuse yourself, then the Jew passes on, and thinks time and money too valuable to waste on you.'

'I quite understand. It is a right principle.'

'And then,' the sardine continues, 'a Jew always considers himself bound to look after women and children as far as he can; that is, his own womenfolk, or the womenfolk of his friends.'

'It is a great comfort for the women. It just occurs to me that I never heard of a Jewess going in for woman's rights.'

'Oh no,' he says, shaking his head; 'our women never do that kind of thing. 'They are too well educated and taken care of, and they know when they are well off.'

'And so they don't want "rights"?'

'Oh no,' he answers solemnly. 'They are very well off as they are, and they know it. We never expect our women to be dummies, and we know they are not fools, and we always consult them about things that concern them; that's all they want, you know.'

'And then, you are proud of them. I have so often noticed that.'

'Of course we are proud of them. We ought to be; for you can't match them. That's why we like taking them about with us, instead of leaving them at home; besides, we think women have as much right to enjoy themselves and go about as men. That's what your people don't seem to see, and then the women cry out. You don't understand that a woman likes being treated properly and yet taken care of at the same time.'

'And you do understand it,' I say.

'Yes, we do; and we know that we can do with fewer things than women can, and we take care that they get more accordingly. On the whole, our women have a very good time.'

'And don't you think ours have?'

'Some of you; some of you haven't;' and he gets up and walks about the room, looking at the things again. He stops before the picture on the easel. 'I don't think anything of that picture,' he says; 'don't believe any dealer in London would give you ten pounds for it.'

'Don't abuse it. It was so kind of him to give it to me.'

'I like this little thing much better,' he says, going up to Edith Clark's little painting.

Suddenly an idea strikes me. 'Let me give it to you,' I say eagerly. 'I should so like you to have it; do take it;' and I try to put it into his hands, but he pushes it away.

'Oh no; wouldn't take it for the world. Why, you refused twenty pounds for it.'

'I know, but I should so like to give it to you.'

'Can't be done,' he says, shaking his head. 'It looks so well where it is. You mustn't go wanting to give away your valuables like that.'

'Oh, but to so good a friend as you are. It would please me so if you would have it, Mr. Cohen.' But he shakes his head again.

'You shall leave it to me in that wonderful will you are going to make,' he says; 'then, when you are about to chump up, it will be a comfort to you to know that I am going to get it.'

'I'll give it to you for a wedding gift when you marry.'

'Very well. You'll have to wait a good while first.'

'I am sorry for that,' I say.

He looks quite pleased. 'Oh, come, now, don't begin about that. Every one is always at me. You women are never content unless you are match-making.'

'I think you ought to be married,' I say, with all my heart. 'You would be so good to your wife, and she would be very proud of you.'

'Don't see what she would have to be proud of,' he says; but there is something in his voice that almost tells one that he is thinking of his balance at his banker's with satisfaction, and reflecting that it isn't such a bad thing to be proud of, after all.

'But, really,' I say earnestly, for I know that he likes to be asked about it, 'why don't you marry?'

'Never see any one I care quite enough about. There was a little girl once who might have done; but she didn't seem to see it, so I cleared off.'

'Why didn't she see it?'

'I don't know; I thought she did at first. She had an unfortunate relation in the shape of an aunt, who objected to me—had larger views, I think, so I left her to contemplate them. That aunt was too

much of a millstone for any girl's neck. She was a nice little girl'—and he almost sighs—'nice, gentle little thing; would have suited me down to the ground.'

'Perhaps it will all come right yet.'

'Oh no; just as well it shouldn't. After all, you know, it's a fearful business getting married.'

'Yes, it is; but there's nothing in this wide world like it if you get the right person.'

'And there's nothing in this wide world like it if you get the wrong one,' he laughs. 'I must go, Mrs. Keith. You won't start for another week or two, I expect. I am going to Scotland for ten days or so, but I shall come and see you before you start. I am very glad we have made up our little differences. I'll make it all right about—about that.' He shrinks from even naming the money, the good, kind sardine, though he has written down the name of the bank in his pocket-book. 'I'll write to Marseille, and tell them they are to look after my aunt and her family when they turn up, and take them on to Malaga.'

'Your aunt?'

'Yes; my aunt or cousins or something like that, you know. There's nothing like a capacity for lying to a moderate extent—so useful. Let me see, now; any other business? Oh, I'll find out what day the boat gets there, and drop you a line;

then you can start accordingly. It would be a great bore for you to be staying too long at Marseille.'

'Why, Mr. Cohen, you seem to have adopted us. I wish I understood business as well as you do, and could arrange things.' I sigh. I am getting very tired, and long to be with my little child again.

'A good thing you can't,' he says fervently. 'I hate business women myself, and always leave them to take care of themselves. I like women to be clever and suggestive and full of resources, and plucky, and a trifle helpless;' and, having explained his views regarding women to his own satisfaction, the sardine departs, and as the door closes I fly up the nursery stairs, and taking Molly in my arms, walk up and down the room with her. It is very quiet without Jack. He has been gone these two days, and all the house seems to be aching for a sight of him.

What a comfort it is to sit down and think over the sardine's kindness! I have no longer any feeling about borrowing the money, except that of being very grateful to him, and a sense of safety at knowing that I have a friend in the world so staunch and generous. I like to think of his manner to-day, of the happiness it gave him to help us, of the delicacy with which he avoided talking of it more than he could help, and how he seemed to shrink from even mentioning the word 'money.' At heart he is just a

perfect gentleman, whatever he may choose to make his manner; I am glad to have taken his help, and am proud of it.

After Molly is in bed I pack up a little parcel for nurse, and write and implore the dear old careless soul not to come until she has leave. Then I sit down with a drawerful of children's clothes before me, and begin to look over and mend them before packing them into a travelling-case. Now that nurse has gone there are so many extra things to do. It is rather nice to mend Jack's clothes, the bonnie, sturdy little sonnie; all his pockets are torn. I long to see his face again; perhaps I shall get another little note from Mrs. Marshall presently, though one came this morning, full of praise and little anecdotes about him. Just these few hours since the money business has been settled there has been a little lull in the storm, as if, with the means of trying the one thing that would do Molly good, a half-promise from some strange power had come that she should get well. It is very odd, but it seems lately as if with Molly's illness more strength had come to me, so that I can see and hear and feel more acutely, and my hands long to touch the brushes again. Perhaps out of one strong feeling another is growing, and in the future my hands will do better work than they have yet done. A thousand things suggest themselves all at once, and I long to be at work, and feel

that I could work well. The thought of the sardine's goodness will help me; the debt shall soon be paid: and yet I shall be almost sorry when it is; it is nice to have so generous a creditor.

There is a double knock at the street door. The sound half amuses me. It is a shy, almost frightened knock; probably a nurse applying for the place, for I do not know any one likely to come at this hour of the evening. I think quickly of Molly sleeping above, and hastily kiss the hole in Jack's sleeve, and go to the room door and listen. There is some one speaking in a low voice. .

'No, I will not come in,' I hear, as with a heart that suddenly stands still I recognise the hard but broken tones; 'ask Mrs. Keith if she will come out and speak to me.' It is Mrs. Marshall. Oh, what does it mean! Jack——

CHAPTER VII.

THE morning light is coming once again. I can see the tops of the houses opposite, and the trees are no longer a confused mass in the darkness, but are green and almost separate. This is the third night that I have walked up and down, wondering if in the morning I should still be sane. If I might only be with him and nurse him and watch him, and see each change, each hope and fear that comes and goes, then I could be calm and silent and show no sign. But here alone, away from him, with the caged feeling, the doors closed between him and me—between me and the room in which he lies and calls for me perhaps, and longs for me, and yet no mother is there with him—here away from him I have no control. If I could only keep my wild heart still and take things calmly as some women do who perhaps love as well as I. But no, but no, these little ones are all I have; the touch of their little hands goes through me, and every nerve answers to the sound of their voices or the sight of their faces. Oh but to keep them! To live and bear the cruellest

pain, to slave day and night and know no rest, to be cut off from everything and every one, yet keep these little ones, and I would be satisfied; or if death must come, let it come to me. To die the saddest, loneliest death I would think sweet, if only they might grow up and be strong and find good life in the world.

Jack has scarlet fever; they doubt if he can live. Oh, nurse, will you ever forgive yourself? Even in the midst of all my misery I am sorry for you, poor soul.

He is at Mrs. Marshall's still. They have been goodness itself, and he has had the best of doctors and of nurses, of everything that money could do or love devise; but I have not seen him, they will not let me, and it is driving me mad. They say I might take it, or give it to Molly; but I am not incautious like nurse. They say I can do him no good—but ah! he'll die. I know it. I crept to the door at twelve o'clock last night to ask how he was, and to beg them to let me in. He was no better; that is what they always say—no better. To-day I *must* see him; I must indeed. There is a little housemaid here who loves and is very good to Molly, and I will take fresh clothes with me, and walk long miles, and do all the things that are wise to prevent infection. Doctors do not take it; why should I?

It is getting lighter; another hour, and I may go to the house and ask again. Sleep on, Molly;

sleep on, my little child. Ah, the blessed hours that children sleep through, while those who love them wake and sorrow! There is the rocking-horse in the nursery. It kills me to see it, and yet something makes my quaking heart and reluctant feet take me again and again to it, and I stand and watch it, wondering if some dim sense of what is coming has crept over it, and the room, and all that is in it, for there is an air of parting and desolation and sorrow over everything.

'The four-and-twenty sailors that walk about the decks
Are four-and-twenty white mice with chains about their necks.'

It rings in my head as I walk up and down; I stand still and begin to sing it, but stop with a little cry of fright at my own voice, and put my hands over my mouth.

It is time at last; I take the portmanteau with the change of clothes, and, kissing Molly gently as she lies sleeping, start for Mrs. Marshall's. How many times I have driven from St. John's Wood to Kensington these last few days! Even the streets as I pass along seem sullen and sad and sorry for him.

The servant opens the door gently. My lips refuse to speak, but she knows what I want to ask.

'He is just the same,' she says. 'Will you come in?'

I have never been admitted before, but now,

dazed and wondering, I enter. In a few minutes Mrs. Marshall comes to me in the drawing-room.

'He is just the same,' she repeats, in a sad voice, and with a look of misery on her face which I see even in the midst of my own dread.

'Let me see him,' I plead; 'do let me see him. He is my own child. I cannot bear it. I know how well you mean it; but oh, let me see him, do let me see him.'

She takes my hands and forces me back on to the sofa, and, still holding them, speaks.

'You can do no good,' she says gently. 'You may take it yourself, or give it to the other child.'

'But you have seen him. Why should I take it more than you?'

'And if I do,' she answers, in her hard, grinding voice, 'my life is not so valuable as yours.'

'Oh yes; you have your husband.' But she does not answer, and the words seem to have been spoken into some dreary waste in which they can have no meaning.

'Tell me how he is again,' I plead. 'Is he any better?' She holds my hands still more tightly and answers.

'I must not deceive you, my poor dear; he is not any better.'

They let me see him . . . I took him in my

arms and kissed him . . . I think he knew me; then he said, 'Where is mother? I do want mother so. Where's mummy?' . . . oh, Jack! oh, Jack.

. . . . . .

So many times lately I have thought that it would be very lonely for him sleeping out there all alone in the stillness and darkness, and we far away. How cruel it seemed to go and leave him! But now Jack is with him. Ah, my little son, how good it must be to be there; and how soundly you will sleep on through all the ages. If I were only with you. But there is Molly.

CHAPTER VIII.

DID you ever sit alone after some terrible storm in your life had passed and left you blankly staring the future in the face, half wondering, half doubting that you were living still, and think sadly over your old day-dreams?—the things that years ago you had meant to do in the happy days to come, things that seemed as if they would be so easy and pleasant, and so certain to wait on time and opportunity? I sit thinking over my old dreams this afternoon, here in the little drawing-room once more.

To-morrow we start for Malaga, Molly and I. I wonder when we shall return, or if either of us will? This house is let to a young married couple. He is an artist. It is rather a comfort to me that he is; it seems natural that he should come to live and work here. They both appeared to like the little bits of rubbish about the place—the sketches, and the pots and pans and plants; but they did not appreciate the poor picture on the easel any more than the sardine did. Yet to me it has always been so strangely pathetic, and now I seem to know what

it all means. It dawned upon me while the little bride and her husband were here the other day, going through the rooms with merry laughter, thinking how cosy they would be in our little home. They laughed at the rocking-horse, and the bride stroked it, and said it was a 'dear big beast,' like one she had had at home, and then they both laughed; and while they were laughing, I was forcing back my tears, and listening to a voice, the merriest voice that ever mother's heart answered to, singing—

'The four-and-twenty sailors that walk about the decks.'

When they had made their arrangements, in the careless, happy-go-lucky fashion of youth and belief in the world, and had gone away, then I sat thinking of the picture, as I had many times before. Now I understood it, and knew what the dead people sleeping over the hill had looked like; how they had laughed, and cried, and hoped, and sorrowed; and how thankful they had been to lay their heads down at last. The waves had gone on dashing over the shingly beach year after year towards the garden wall; the seaweed had been heaped up here and there higher and higher, and then the pitiful sea took it back again; and farther up I saw the flowers dying, and heard the last hum of birds and bees, and knew when the swallows had journeyed south, and quiet and silence and forgetfulness reigned over all, and

the tired ones slept soundly. But now all was changing. The birds were singing again, and the sun shining, and soon the flowers would bloom, and all around would be alive and happy, 'bright with a summer to be.' But the sleepers over the hill would know nothing and care nothing; for what would it matter to them to whom nothing would matter more?

'We will take it for a couple of years, if you like, Mrs. Keith,' the husband said, as he followed his bride out of the house; so we may be wanderers for as long as we please.

Only a year ago—nay, less, last winter—I sat many a long hour thinking how happy the children should be as they grew up, what merry days they should have to remember, to what bright ones they should look forward. It is a good thing to have a happy childhood: it keeps the heart green through all after troubles; it sends a little perpetual current of youth through a whole life. My children should have this at least. It seemed such a blessed thing to have these two little lives, and I used to think that if I brought them up to be good and true and pure and above all selfishness, it would be good work enough. For every woman who gives to the world even one sweet woman or one good citizen, has given it something in return for all it has given her. So many plans I made in those happy dreaming hours, thinking how in the long evenings I would

tell them fairy stories, till quite gradually they learnt to like best to hear stories that were true; and then, just as Mazzini advised mothers to do in the twilight hour, I would tell them about 'the great men who had worked and loved the people.' It has been something to imagine their little upturned faces, and to see by the firelight the eagerness in their eyes.

But it is useless to go over it all, and I must not break down, for there are many things to do yet, and at nine o'clock to-morrow morning we start. The sardine was coming to say good-bye, but telegraphed just now that he was prevented, and would meet us at the station in the morning to see us off; so one of the two people who have been so kind to us will see the last of us, and the other is coming this afternoon.

Mr. Beccles wrote after Jack died, and said he could raise the money now that a reasonable security was possible. But I felt that Mr. Cohen would be sorely disappointed if his help were, after all, not taken; so I refused Mr. Beccles, and felt some satisfaction in doing it. I have made the will at which the sardine laughed, and left him the little picture he liked, and arranged for the repayment of the debt; and then, if Molly does not survive me or dies under age, all there is will be divided between the only two friends we possessed in the world.

All this I have been thinking over, sitting here waiting for Mrs. Marshall. The door opens at last, and she enters. She wears a black gown; the lines in her face are softened; the tones of her voice are different.

'I am almost afraid to come,' she says; but I knew that before she spoke. 'It must be so painful to you to see me.'

'It makes me think, of course, of painful things; but it is a great comfort to see you. I have been longing for you;' and this is true; I have indeed. Can I ever forget how good she was to Jack, how gentle and how tender? I would give anything to put my arms round her neck and sob my heart out on her shoulder, and to feel that she was not only sorry for me, but loved me just a little bit. But that will never be.

'And you really start to-morrow?'

'Yes; to-morrow morning.'

'And you are quite sure that it is wise to go alone, without a nurse or maid of any kind?'

'Oh yes,' I answer. 'I have always waited on myself, and I should not let any one else wait on Molly. One child and two hands; surely they are enough. They can do everything for her. It would have been different if——'

'I know,' she says hastily. 'How is Molly?'

'She is just the same.'

'She will be better soon. Climate does so much.'

'Sometimes I think it will do nothing for her,' I answer doggedly, 'and that it is folly to go.'

'You must not say that,' she answers gently. 'Be thankful that you can go. So many see their dear ones die, thinking that some things they could not get would have saved them.'

The force of this comes home to me keenly. 'I know,' I answer quickly, 'and am only too thankful that we are able to go; after a little while when I am used to—having Molly alone, I shall be brave again. Overmuch happiness has spoilt me for sorrow, and made me impatient; but I shall be better soon. It is a terrible thing to be born with a great capacity for happiness, and to feel that one has hardly had one's share;' and I try to laugh, and fail.

She is silent for a few minutes, and then she asks, in a sad, broken voice, 'Did your husband love you, my dear?'

'Oh yes, yes,' I cry, 'with all his heart.'

'As you did him?'

'As I did him,' I answer, trembling with eagerness and passionate remembrance. She sits still, watching me wearily and wonderingly.

'And you had your children when he was here?' she asks, with a long-drawn sigh.

'Yes; there was little Jack. He was such a pretty baby; we have laughed for joy as we watched him——'

'And Molly?'

'And Molly was coming; there was the hope of her, the looking forward. Oh, it was perfect.'

She takes my hands, just as she did on that morning a month ago, and looks me sadly in the face, and in her eyes I see a blank hopelessness that drives my own sorrow out of my heart, and leaves it full of compassion for hers.

'Then, be satisfied,' she says gently; 'you have had your share. If you had only possessed all you have had for a single hour, you would have had your share. Be thankful for that. There are many women with capacity as great as yours for happiness, who are hungry for it all their lives, and yet are never satisfied for a single hour.'

I look at her silently, while the tears slowly gather in her eyes. Now I understand all her coldness and silence, the hard lines, the almost grim voice, and all that had seemed half resentful in her before. I cannot speak, only we look at each other —she who remembers so little, and I who remember so much.

'There are some things worse than death,' she says, as the tears roll down her cheeks; and I stoop and kiss her hands and whisper—

'Yes, you are right. Oh, forgive me, and I will cry out no more.'

'Ah, my dear, it is hard to keep one's mouth shut when the blow falls; but remember that to bear silently is to show that you think even your bitterest woe not too great a price to pay for your past happiness. You would not have refused to bear the sorest pain for those you——?'

'Oh no, no!' I cry.

'And you are bearing this for them. You would not have sorrowed so if you had not loved them. Be thankful that you have had your loved ones to bear your sorrow for.' And then she gets up and pulls the cloak round her shoulders. 'I want to see Molly,' she says; and I go and fetch Molly from the little room adjoining, where the housemaid has been reading a fairy story aloud.

Good-bye, little woman,' Mrs. Marshall says, in a voice so kind and gentle that Molly looks up and has confidence, and its sweetness catches my ear, and I long to hear her speak again; and yet her voice is usually so hard. She takes Molly up in her arms, holding her in that longing, half-wondering manner just dashed with fear that is so characteristic of childless women. Then she puts her down, and watches me while I wrap a shawl about my little one, and carry her back to the other room again. She is still standing when I return. She hesitates for a

moment, and half doubtfully, half awkwardly, she comes forward and kisses me tenderly on both cheeks, and looks at my face—a long, grave, sad look, as though she thought she might never see it more; and then she goes. I follow her to the street door, and watch her go down the garden. She turns round at the gate, and says quickly, as if she suddenly remembered something she had forgotten—

'I hope the child will get well. Good-bye.' She takes yet another last look at me, and so she vanishes, and I go back to the little empty drawing-room and shut the door.

It seems as if we shall never be ready, as if the night and the things to be done will never come to an end; but at last the morning dawns, and the work is finished, and with one last look round at the dear little home—the home in which my husband had painted and Jack had played—we depart. The sardine is at the station before us, looking pleased and businesslike.

'You are in good time. Quite right, always be in good time for a journey,' he says approvingly. 'I have got a compartment for you, so you have only to get in, and I'll look after the luggage.'

'Why, Mr. Cohen, you did not surely get a whole compartment for us?'—for we are not used to such luxuries.

'Merely a little corruption,' he remarks, with extreme satisfaction; and, stopping before a carriage door, he unlocks it with his key and helps us in. 'Always corrupt the guard, or the station-master, or some one or other. Do it on principle, you know.'

'Oh, but it is wrong, surely——'

'Never mind that. Never over-cultivate your conscience; it's a great mistake, spoils one's enjoyment, and makes everything cut and dried.' The sardine always talks as if he had no serious feelings, as if the whole of him was on the surface. He told me once that one of his 'ideas' in regard to life was to get as much enjoyment as possible out of everything, and to forget everything in two minutes. He is delighted at having surprised us by his cleverness. 'Wouldn't it have been a bore, now,' he asks, 'if you had had two fat women, or half a dozen children, all anxious to quarrel with Molly, in the carriage with you?'

'Indeed it would,' I answer, amused at the idea of Molly quarrelling with any one. 'How do you think Molly looks?' I ask him, for he has hardly spoken to her yet, and she looks sweeter than ever this morning in her little travelling-hood, and with the flush that excitement has brought to her face.

'Oh, she's all right,' he says, putting his long fingers under her little soft chin. 'She looks ever so much better than you do,' he remarks. 'You'll

have to look out, or you will chump up, and then what would the programme be, I should like to know?'

'It would be very awkward,' I answer cheerfully. 'I think you would have to adopt Molly.'

'That would be a joke,' he says thoughtfully.

'You would have to get a stepmother for her,' I say, trying to amuse him. 'The "little party," you know.'

He shakes his head gravely. 'Oh no; that will never come to anything,' he says. 'You must get well. You will now; going away will soon set you up, and Molly too. Well, here we are—time to start. Write and tell me how they treat you, and how the young 'un prospers. Good-bye.' He shakes my hand, and kisses Molly, and in another minute I am straining my eyes to see the last of him as we whirl away.

When he is out of sight I turn to Molly, who is sitting opposite, looking pretty and bright and almost well. As I looked at her a sudden hope seizes me, and, forgetting everything else, I kneel down and put my arms round her, and kiss her, and hold her close, and hide my face in her lap, while all my strength goes forth in a wild hope and prayer that she may live and be strong.

CHAPTER IX.

We have been three days here at Marseille. There was some mistake about the boats; they only call once a fortnight now, so it will be nearly a week before we start for Malaga. I am glad of it. These days are very quiet and peaceful, a blessed lull in the storm; the beginning, perhaps, of a great calm to come. Molly looks so well that it makes my heart beat quick with hope to look at her. The travelling did not tire her. The journey from Calais to Paris she slept through, and then the strange sights and trees of Paris—for we stayed a night there—delighted her, and made her open her blue eyes wide with wonder, and break out into little ripples of laughter, almost as if she were suddenly quite well again.

'It is so nice, mummy!' she cried, with a long-drawn sigh of content. We strolled on through the streets, watching the light-hearted French people. In the Rue de Rivoli there was a man selling [illegible] that, when wound up, danced on a little metal [illegible]. We stood watching them for a few minutes.

'Would you like one?' I asked Molly.

'Yes, mother,' she answered, in a whisper; and so for a franc and a half we bought one, and all the way from Paris to Marseille it was with her. But she tired of that long journey, and once or twice began to cry for Jack.

'Oh, mummy dear, where is Jack? Do tell me where Jack really is. Won't he ever come back?'

And I could only answer, 'He was very ill, my darling, and now he is fast asleep. You would not like dear Jack to suffer pain?'

'But I do want him so,' she sobbed; 'and perhaps he would get well again.'

'Won't mother do for you, my sweet? She loves you, and will play with you, and read stories to you, and do everything in the world for you. Won't poor mother do?' I asked.

'Oh, but you are not little, mother dear, and Jack is, you know: and then Jack sings so beautifully. I do want Jack.'

But while she was still sobbing we were getting nearer and nearer to Marseille, and, putting my head out of the window, I caught sight of the gilt statue of Notre Dame de la Garde, which towers above the city. I held Molly up to see it, and she gave a cry of surprise and was satisfied, and did not even see the tears I brushed away, or, if she did, looked on them as belonging to the past—the past

of just a few minutes since, as her own had done, and to be forgotten as they were.

It seems so strange to be here alone with Molly. We are never apart for five minutes. The thought of work comes now and then, but since Jack died my hands have lost their sense of power, and feel as if they could only wait on Molly. It satisfies and soothes me, this life lived in her service, and it forces me to be cheerful, knowing that a hundred times a day her eyes seek my face that she may set her little heart by its expression.

We have spent the days almost entirely out in the sunshine, beneath the southern sky, in sight of the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Many parts of Marseille are dreary enough, but surely the Cannebière is one of the brightest, grandest streets in Europe? Molly is delighted to walk by my side slowly along the wide pavement, beneath the great awnings outside the *cafés*. They are wonderful *cafés*; we are afraid to enter them, but we can see the palms and the looking-glasses and the pictures, as we go slowly past. Outside, on the pavement, are the little round tables, and the happy French folk drinking their coffee, and talking or reading the little newspapers with all their usual eagerness and all the blessed forgetfulness of care that is so characteristic of their nation. We wander on towards the quay, and look at the great ships and tall masts, and

I, wondering whence they have come and whither they are going, tell Molly of strange lands far away; and she, understanding better since she left her home that the world stretches far beyond it, listens as if she were listening to some new fairy-tale. We stop as we come back, and turn down the Rue de Grignan, and, coming to the post-office, ask if there are any letters. To my surprise, there is one from the sardine. He has found out about the alteration in the boats, and says how sorry he is at the delay; but I am not. We shall not be happier at Malaga than we are here. We walk on till we come to the Cannebière again, and linger by the shops that have placed their wares on wide stalls outside their windows, and Molly talks of spending her little store of money; but when we get nearer to them the things that have looked so bright in the distance are all commonplace and useless, and most of them are English, and even Molly is not tempted. She likes the flower-market better than anything else in Marseille. We go there every morning. The first time she saw the women in the raised wooden stalls so like pulpits, with the great bouquets on the counter, and the baskets brimming over with flowers at their feet, she laughed aloud for joy.

Yesterday we saw an Arab sitting on the ground, selling black beads made of rose-leaves, and baskets of coloured cloth, and charms of shells, and all

manner of little odds and ends. We had neither of us ever seen an Arab before, and we stood together looking at him like a couple of foolish children. To Molly he was merely a strange being, with a brown face and a red fez and funny clothes; but to me he was a whole past suddenly risen up before me, and swiftly I thought of the people he had descended from, of their teaching and their learning, of the universities they had founded and the palaces they had built, of all their glories and triumphs, and of the beggars and the ruins that remained. All in a moment they seemed mixed up before my eyes in the odd, incoherent manner that all things pass before me now, for nothing is clear or consecutive. The Arab tried to tempt us with his wares, and I bought one of the rose-leaf necklaces for Molly. They say there is a charm in them, but it looked so black about her neck that it made me shudder.

We spend hours on the Prado, looking up at the trees and the little bits of blue sky we can see between the green leaves, or listening to the trickling of the fountains, and watching the busy groups and the carriages and the tramcars going past in the Cannebière beyond. We sat on one of the seats for a long time yesterday, after our bargaining with the Arab, and amused ourselves by watching the dancing sunshine that came through the leaves. And Molly looked so well and happy that even with the past

fresh and sore upon me, I felt that if only the world might stand still at that one moment I could for ever be content. Did not Keats envy the shepherd and the shepherdess on the urn, and the happy chase through all the ages? If only the world would stand still as it had for those two lovers, how good it would be. But that would not be life, for crystallisation is death; and yet for death so sweet would not life be a trifling price to pay? Sometimes it is not warm enough to sit long on the Prado, and then we walk slowly up and down; and if Molly looks tired or cold, I take her up in my arms and carry her. Her weight makes me stagger now and then, but it is only because I am so broken down, for she is very light, and it is a blessed thing to carry her in my arms again, as I used in the little garden at home when she was still a baby; it makes me fancy that she is a baby still. And it makes me think of Jack, the first little one of all, whose coming made our hearts sing for joy in the happy days gone by.

This is a wonderful city. Every day it grows more impressive; for, as it knows one better, it seems to take one into its confidence, and to tell one how full it is of memories. I am never tired of watching the water, and thinking of the ships that sailed upon it hundreds of years ago, or of wondering what it all looked like when the Greeks came and built their

city. It seems to be like a dream now, just as these days are like a dream. Oh that the waking might never come!

How odd are some things of which we can give no rational account. Last night, while Molly was in bed, I sat by her, as I always do—half through the night sometimes, for it seems a pity to waste too much of this most precious time in sleep. And as I watched her, in her little white gown, with her head upon the pillow, she looked like some pure spirit come into the world to bless it. 'She will not surely go?' I thought; and then something—ah, what was it?—seemed to say to me half pityingly, 'Can you not submit? There may be a worse fate still than seeing your little one die; a day may come, perhaps, when you will wonder that you cried out at Death, that only lingered near in mercy, and to save you.' To save me? 'There are some things worse than death,' Mrs. Marshall said. Oh, but it is all nonsense and madness and folly. What can anything matter more if Molly does but live? If Molly lives and gets strong, then Fate is powerless, and all the world may try its worst, for all other blows have fallen. Pain and poverty or anything in the world may come if this one little life remains. Sometimes at night, when I hear her short, quick breathing, I stand still and tremble and clasp my hands in fear; but then she turns in her sleep, and is easier, and a

new spell of hope comes again; and so the days go by.

We went an excursion to-day, in one of the tramcars with the seats that reverse. It seemed a pity to spend money on a carriage, and the people in the tramcars looked so happy that we longed to be among them. It is terrible how one hungers for happiness when one is still young; it is only the old that can be content with sorrow, and make it their accepted lot. We looked at each other with satisfaction as we took our seats. We both felt the same, I think—like two children overdone by fate, and longing to be happy. We went far out to a suburb, but its name I have already forgotten. When the car stopped and went no farther, we got down and walked about, and found some trees that looked like sturdy green carubas, the evergreen of John the Baptist, and, in the half-dazed fashion I have got into, they set me dreaming again. And then we came to a long white sunny road, with seats here and there, and a high stone wall on one side, and the blue sea on the other. Over the wall some bright flowers hung in masses. I picked a bunch and made a wreath and put it round Molly's straw hat, and she looked so lovely that it made me laugh right out. Laugh out! though it is not six weeks since I laid my boy to rest, and the sun that shines on us is shining on the grass above him. My heart

quaked at the sound of my own merriment; and yet —and yet, Molly dear, get well, and I will laugh for you, my sweet.

As we got up from the seat, Molly gave a cry of wonder and surprise, for a long green lizard darted past, and she had never seen one before. We stood still, hand in hand, and watched it for a moment as it disappeared among the stones. Then we crossed the road and went over to the sea, and walked a little way, but she looked so tired that I carried her, and so we went on till we came to a *café*. It was a little countrified place, with a table outside and two chairs slanting into the sandy ground, and a red curtain hung across the doorway to keep the inside cool. We entered and rested. It was half a restaurant too, for they had bread and wine, and very hard cheese and fruit. I had some coffee, and Molly ate some small black grapes, while the old Frenchwoman looked at her, and told me she was beautiful; and when I smiled and seemed pleased she added that she did not look like a strong child, as if she thought it well to show that she had discriminating eyes, and wished to qualify the pleasure she had given. But she was a kind old woman, and when we left she came out of the door and stood watching us on our way, as though she thought it a good thing to keep so sweet a little child in sight as long as possible. The tramcar seemed as if it would never come, so

when a chance fly overtook us we stopped it, for Molly was very tired; but she brightened up as we got in. It was an open fly, and the cushions were covered with red and white striped holland.

'Such a pretty carriage,' she said, and sat up proudly on the seat beside me. The soft wind blew back her hair, and I felt proud to think that she was my own little daughter, and wondered what she would look like some day when she had grown to be a woman. She crept a little closer to me, and whispered 'Mother dear, what are you thinking about?' and for answer I put my arms around her and drew her closer, and so we drove to the city of Marseille, and to the hotel.

This morning the ship has come, and we are to sail at four o'clock. We take our last walk down the Cannebière, a last walk among the flowers. We pass the Arab with the beads; there are two or three of his countrymen about to-day. We walk once more along the Prado, looking up at the trees, and sit down on the seat for a few minutes, so that the sunshine coming through the leaves above may fleck us with its gold once more. A few hours later we are driving to the quay, and say good-bye to Marseille, while the statue of Notre Dame de la Garde seems to be watching us on our way to Malaga.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE we have been long on board we make acquaintance with one of the passengers. She sits down, and in the course of an hour, in a dull, mechanical sort of way, tells us all about herself. She is a young woman, pale and quiet. She has the air of a nursery governess, and something in her manner suggests that she is an orphan. She is companion to a Mrs. Greenside, who is not very well and in her cabin.

'Mrs. Greenside is always getting ill,' Miss Martin says softly; 'that is why she goes about so much.'

'And does it do her good?' I ask.

'No; I don't think so. She never says that she is better,' Miss Martin answers.

'Perhaps she likes travelling,' I say, just for the sake of saying something, and not because I feel particularly interested in Miss Martin or in Mrs. Greenside.

'Yes, perhaps she does,' Miss Martin says, and the utter want of interest in her manner and the dull tones of her voice make one sorry for her.

'And you—do you like travelling?' I ask her.

'Oh yes, sometimes; only I always get tired of the places, and it is tiresome to be always packing.'

She is not a companion of the lady description, but of the respectable young person type. She does not say 'ma'am,' but for all that she brushes Mrs. Greenside's hair, and does the packing, and probably gets scolded if anything is left behind.

'Are you not looking forward to seeing your home?' I ask; for she looks at me in the pauses, as if meekly waiting to be questioned. She told me a few minutes since that she and Mrs. Greenside had been abroad for some months.

'No,' she answers; 'I don't think about it much.'

'I thought, perhaps, you had friends or relations, and were longing to see them. People get so anxious about relations when they are far away.'

'Oh yes; I have relations, of course,' she says. 'I suppose I shall be glad to see them when the time comes; but it is no good looking forward or thinking of meeting them beforehand. They may be ill, or a dozen things. Are you going all the way to Bordeaux by this ship?'

The question is evidently only put to make conversation of some sort. She is no more curious concerning us than interested in herself.

'No; only to Malaga, to winter there. My child

76351

is ill,' I add, looking towards Molly, who is anxiously watching the man at the wheel.

'I see,' she answers placidly, as if she thinks a child's illness as good a reason as any other for coming abroad. 'That gentleman is going to Malaga,' she says, indicating a tall man a little way off; 'I saw it on his luggage. His name is George Murray.'

'Murray? Why, that is the name of the doctor to whom I have an introduction; but it can't be the same, for his name is John Taylor Murray.' I look at him curiously as he slowly passes us. 'He has a good face,' I remark.

'Has he?' she answers. 'I have not looked at him; people are so much alike abroad. I never look at them now; but I always notice the names on their luggage. I knew yours was Mrs. Keith before you came on board. I saw your trunks coming up the gangway.'

Molly runs up to us, her eyes bright with pleasure, her cheeks tinged with a colour that looks like health.

'I do so like being in a ship!' she exclaims. 'It is so funny to think that, even if it stops, there is nothing but water to get out on. It would not do to get off the ship, would it, mother?'

'No, my child; it wouldn't,' I laugh, and look up at Miss Martin; but she seems a little bored, and

looks over the side of the ship at the waves for a moment or two, and then absently moves away.

When the dinner-bell rings, I find that my place at table is next to Mr. Murray, so conclude that, like myself, he is a recent comer. We soon begin to talk, for on board ship it is an easy matter to get on friendly terms in even a few minutes; but there is no time to ask him whether he is related to the doctor at Malaga, for I have to hurry away from the table, because it is the hour at which Molly goes to bed. When she is sleeping, I creep upstairs in the twilight, and stand watching the water and the long track the ship leaves on the waves behind us. It is a little cold, and I pull my shawl tighter round me and sit down and think. But I cannot bear it long; the sea is too full of memories and all the shadows of meaning, and the darkness and the silence frighten me. Oh, the silence! how terrible it is. There is no eloquence in this living world so terrible as silence; but it is the eloquence of the dead. I cannot bear it longer, and turn and go to the cabin where Molly is, and sleep on the sofa beneath the window, opposite her berth, so that when day breaks I may open my eyes to look upon her face. And so the night passes.

Molly awakes early, and cries, 'Mother!' It is like the voice of a bird calling from a branch. I open my tired eyes, and blow kisses to her, and call

her my pretty one and my dickie-bird; and she laughs and talks, and looks like a fresh-blown rose, as if in the night all sickness and weakness had fled away.

'We will go on deck and see the waves,' I say, and begin to dress her.

Sometimes I feel sorry for men. More greatness is theirs in life, but more sweetness is ours—the sweetness that is gained from little things, especially from the daily service given to those we love. I think this as I put on Molly's clothes, while even my finger-tips are sensible of the happiness there is in touching each thing that is hers.

It is a bright, happy morning, and every wave and ripple rejoices in it. Molly looks round, and gives a little shout for joy as we go on deck, and holds my hand a little tighter just because she feels how lovely it all is, and has no other way of expressing herself. Perhaps they expressed themselves so in the beginning of the world, when beauty and happiness were born, but words were not. They did well enough without them, and again I think how eloquent is silence. There is a blissful silence for the living as well as a terrible one for the dead. But I will forget everything concerning death and sorrow on this sweet morning. The sea does not appal me as it did last night, and the memories it brings are less vivid than they have ever been before. For Molly is looking well, and she and I are together

in the sunshine, and there is the aching and longing for happiness in my heart, and a half-promise seems in the air—a promise that perhaps, softly and unexpectedly, happiness may come stealing back.

'And now,' Molly says, when we are tired of walking about, and have sat down in some still sleeping passenger's chair, for it wants nearly an hour to breakfast, and no one is on deck but ourselves—'and now tell me a story.'

I protest that I don't know one, but she declares I do, and at last I give way, and ask what it shall be, for I seldom tell her new stories, but the old ones over and over again. She seems to think that it is slighting her old friends to like the new ones too well.

'Tell me the story of the white rabbit,' she says.

So I begin the story of the white rabbit. '"*Once upon a time there was a white rabbit, and he lived down a hole in the woods at the foot of the snow mountains,*"' and I go patiently on, until at last, with a sad shake of his little white tail, he disappears in the snow palace, and is seen no more.

'It is such a pretty story,' she says, with a long sigh of satisfaction; and then we laugh, for we both —she as well as I—know how ridiculous it is.

Suddenly we look up and see Mr. Murray. He is watching Molly, as only a man really fond of children watches a child. We soon get into conversation,

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take his patients while he goes to
r the winter,' he says, 'for I am also a

hen you will look after Molly?' I answer, feel-
a sudden interest in him.

'Yes, certainly I will, if you wish it. There is another English doctor at Malaga now, so that my brother is no longer the only one.' There is something honest in this communication. He looks at Molly, and adds, 'The climate will do everything for her.'

'Dr. Finch was not very hopeful,' I say sadly; and tell him what the great doctor has said about her.

'I have seen some strange recoveries,' he answers. 'A child has the most wonderful faculty for outgrowing things, and there is simply no knowing what climate will not do. We have never till lately taken it sufficiently into account. You must make up your mind that she is going to live. A child will outgrow anything, remember.' And so, when the breakfast-bell rings, it finds me with a happier face and a lighter heart than I have worn this long time.

Before the day is out I know all about our doctor. He has been in Ceylon, looking after a coffee estate

that had belonged to his mother, and at the same time investigating the disease in the coffee plant; but he has done some practising as well. He took an excellent degree at Cambridge, and was at one of the London hospitals before going abroad. Now he is on his way to take his brother's practice for the winter, and later on he means to devote himself to the scientific study of medicine. He is very clever, I hear, a little eccentric, very kind-hearted, and fond of children. To look at, he is fair, with soft, kind, grey eyes. He is well but slightly built, and perhaps two or three and thirty years of age. There is something about him that it is impossible to help liking, a manliness and frankness, a certain simple confidence in other people and in the best side of all things that wins one, and makes one feel that he is, above all things, a man to trust and believe in.

How quickly these days have passed. In half an hour we shall be at Malaga, or rather we shall have landed, for we have already dropped anchor, and as soon as the usual formalities are over we shall be allowed to go on shore. All the passengers are on deck, and we who are soon to leave the ship stand looking anxiously at the Spanish land. Malaga itself looks ugly enough, though its setting is splendid. The houses are white, and the windows many—square black windows, like blank, staring eyes with no white

lids to soften them, staring for ever out at the sea. There are tall, smoky chimneys, and the port is dirty and ugly; but for all this there is compensation in the sun, which is shining over everything. Beyond the city the Sierra de Antequera rises far up into the sky; and on the other side is a great mountain gorge. Along the shore we can see the sugar-canes, and stretching far back are palms and what we take to be prickly pears and all the strange vegetation that belongs to the southern land. The water beneath us is still and blue, the air is warm and soft; we hear the dip of the boatmen's oars as they crowd round the ship, and the not very eager voices of the boatmen, offering to take passengers on shore. The stillness around is intense stillness, and every sound that breaks it, whether it be a sailor's voice or the dip of an oar, is clear and distinct. Now and then we see movements on shore, but there are few people about; the whole place seems to be drowsy and sleepy from overmuch sunshine.

Suddenly Miss Martin comes up to me. Mrs. Greenside is not very well. She is afraid to go on, and thinks of landing here. Would I mind coming and speaking to her for a moment? So I leave Molly sitting on a pile of wraps on the top of one of the boxes, and go to the deck-chair a little way back.

Mrs. Greenside is eight-and-forty perhaps, and

overmuch wrinkled for her age. She has very white hands with many rings on them; among them is a lozenge-shaped diamond one. I see it flashing as I go up to her, and wonder if she bought it, or if in bygone years some one loved her very much and gave her all her rings—some one who is now gone. She is not an interesting woman, and one does not care much about her; but, poor thing, this does not make her pains less keen, or her anxieties less real, and I go towards her feeling this, and wishing she did not bore me. There is something about her that is rather overpowering; she takes possession of you, she appeals too obviously to your sympathies, so that, though she is ill and alone, you half grudge them. She gives you the impression that she is capable of shams of many nervous kinds, and yet that she is one of those women who, when they are roused, will take any trouble, push themselves anywhere, do anything, give anything, to attain an object not merely for themselves, but for any one who will come before them at the right moment. I am very uncharitable to her.

'Mrs. Keith,' she says, and her voice is that of one who has really suffered, and makes me sorry for her in a moment, 'I want to ask your advice. You are so clever, and you must have so much courage to travel all alone with your delicate little child, I am sure you will advise me.' She always asks advice

about things in the most earnest manner, but she never takes it. She always seems to have made up her mind from the beginning what she is going to do, but you only find this out after she has listened to all you have to say. 'Don't you think I had better stay at Malaga? these short stoppages and voyages upset me terribly. The voyage from Marseille has tired me so.'

'And you don't feel well?' I ask, wondering why she consults me.

'No, indeed,' and she sighs. 'I am never well; am I, Miss Martin?'

She looks up at her companion. Miss Martin is listlessly watching the boatmen rowing round the ship; but she turns and answers like a machine, 'No; Mrs. Greenside is never well,' and watches the boatmen again.

'Do you like the doctor?' she asks anxiously. 'I understand he is going to take his brother's practice at Malaga.'

'Yes, certainly I like him; but I have only known him since we came on board.'

'Oh, but you have evidently so much discernment of character.'

This is the sort of thing she always says; she seems to believe in the wisdom of every one about her; but it is absurd to believe in mine, for she must know much better than I do about most things.

Perhaps it comforts her, poor soul, to lean even on the weakest props, for it must be miserable to be alone seeking health, and to have none she loves beside her.

'How far were you going by this ship?' I ask.

'To Gibraltar. I expect to meet my brother there, and his dear motherless girl. She is just like my own child. I never had any children of my own,' she adds, shaking her head sadly; and my heart aches for her. 'I never had any children,' she repeats; 'perhaps it is as well, with my wretched health; and this dear girl is just like my own.'

'But if you stop here, will you not miss seeing your brother and niece?' I ask. 'Are they at Gibraltar now?'

'I am not sure whether they have arrived yet,' she answers. 'They have been yachting in the Mediterranean, and expected to put into Gibraltar about the middle of the month, and I promised to wait for them there. My poor brother is still grieving over his wife's death, and there is no one but me now to take care of his motherless girl.'

'But will you not miss them by going to Malaga?' I ask.

'Oh, if I telegraph, telling them the state I am in, they will instantly come to me,' she answers, with a little smile, which seems to say that their devotion

to her is unbounded. 'I can't go back to England this winter; it would kill me to face the cold and fog. You know that, don't you, Miss Martin?'

'Yes, I know that, Mrs. Greenside,' Miss Martin says, turning from the boats again for a minute.

'I should only stay a few weeks at most at Malaga, but it would be a break in my long exile'—she says the word exile as if it meant Siberia—'and the doctor seems to be a clever man, he might do me a world of good; it is so very difficult to come across a good doctor abroad.'

'I dare say you will find it very pleasant at Malaga, Mrs. Greenside,' I say, 'and I hope it will do you good. Perhaps Miss Martin will like seeing Spain too?' I add, looking up at her.

'Oh!' Mrs. Greenside exclaims softly, with a little expression round her mouth that says it really does not matter in the least what Miss Martin likes.

'It is always interesting to see places,' the companion answers, 'only they are so much alike.'

'I think we will arrange to land,' Mrs. Greenside says nervously. 'Thank you so much for your help, Mrs. Keith. Do tell me where you are going to stop; it would be such a comfort to go to the same place.'

I tell her the name of the hotel picked haphazard out of Bradshaw, and then she appears to be satisfied,

and proceeds to make arrangements for going on shore.

Presently, when I am in the saloon getting Molly a glass of water, I run against Miss Martin, with her arms full of wraps and a dressing-bag and half a dozen other things.

'Let me help you carry these up,' I say; and suddenly something makes me ask, 'Miss Martin, is Mrs. Greenside a Jewess?'

'I don't know; she was once. She is not strong enough to trouble about it now; perhaps she is something else. I never thought about it,' the companion answers in her usual voice with her usual expression of face, or I might think that she was joking.

Now I understand what had puzzled me about Mrs. Greenside. I have been wondering if I had met her before. Her face, the pale faded face, that is not thin, yet full of lines and traces of sickness; the large dull eyes; the dark hair pushed back; the diamond rings;—all had seemed familiar to me, but it was not the individual, but the type that I had recognised.

Mrs. Greenside is quite overcome when she sees that I have helped to bring up her belongings.

'Oh, Mrs. Keith!' she exclaims, 'you are too kind. You should have let Miss Martin do this; she is quite used to it. What a sweet child your

little girl is; I have been watching her most intently. She is the image of you, Mrs. Keith.' She looks at me and gives a long sigh, and adds, slowly, 'she is most beautiful.' And then she opens a bag and gives Molly some chocolate, and watches her eat with a solemn interest that is almost touching. She is evidently a very kind woman. I am glad we are going to the same hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

It is very exciting to look at Malaga. I stand and drink it in with my eyes. What does it matter if the houses are ugly and gaunt? There behind are the great mountains, and the bright green vegetation glowing in the light, and above is the blue sky, and all about is the sunshine—the blessed sunshine that is to make my little child well. I turn and look at her, and as our eyes meet we laugh like two children glad to be together, and full of thankfulness that we are here.

A quarter of an hour later, while Miss Martin is still getting Mrs. Greenside's many packages together, Molly and I go down the gangway steps and row to the Spanish shore. I wonder if I shall ever forget the noise and fuss and discomfort of this landing? And yet I do not mind any of it; it amuses me, and the strangeness and newness of everything fascinate me just as they do Molly, who clings to me, and looks up at me with grave eyes wide open and bewildered, not knowing whether to laugh or to be afraid. There is no custom-house. Our luggage

is examined there in the street, while we look on, and the dirty black-eyed beggar boys lean over the rail put to prevent them from crowding round too closely. At last we manage to get into a jolting fly, and the porters and boatmen lift up our luggage, and with much earnestness cheat us right and left before they let us drive off to the hotel.

Mr. Murray was to have been with us, and promised to help us land, but a fireman on board the ship injured his hand, and he stayed behind to see what could be done. But we are all safe now, I think, as we drive away, and look curiously around to see what this new land to which we have come is like. It is not as yet inviting. The streets are dirty, the houses low; we pass no handsome buildings, no gay *cafés* as at Marseille; there are no trees till we get to the Alameda, and there they look dusty and miserable, and the ground beneath them is dirty and ill-kept. Altogether, it looks as cheerless a place for wintering in as can well be imagined. There is a cold north-easterly wind blowing, too; at sea we did not feel it, but here it meets us as we turn the corners of the narrow, unsavoury streets. My heart misgives me, but still I will not be dismayed. Is there not a blue sky overhead, and surely that will see my little Molly get well, and what else matters? Suddenly the excitement fails, a mist gathers about all things, and I remember that I have

been suffering pain these hours past, though I have hardly noticed it.

'Mother dear,' Molly whispers, as we stop at the hotel, 'your face is so white. Are you ill, darling?' and she pushes her hand into mine.

I look round and see some dirty boys watching us. There is a beggar who holds up a diseased arm; there is a man leaning against the doorpost. I can see a little way into the hall of the hotel—it is ugly and dirty; and then all things swim softly away, and I can see the blue water and the ship, and it is all so beautiful, only I am choking; and where is Molly? Is Molly gone?

We are sitting in a little room, evidently just inside the hotel. It looks like the porter's room. There is a half-bottle of wine on the table, and a half-finished plateful of untempting-looking food. Outside the door is our luggage. Some ragged children peep in from the street; I can see the people passing to and fro. Molly has been crying, and clings to me in fear; she kisses me as I look wonderingly around and try to remember what it all means. There is a dark man standing by me, with a look of patient waiting on his face, as if he had been politely wasting his time till it should please me to come to my senses again.

'Is anything the matter?' I ask.

The dark man bows and goes leisurely to the door, and, looking up and down the hall, makes a strange sound which my little knowledge of Spanish will not permit me to understand. It results in the coming of a fair man with a red moustache, and a heavy watch-chain so evidently false that it catches my eye the moment he appears. He is English, and the interpreter to the hotel.

'Is anything the matter?' I repeat.

'You were faint, madam,' he answers, with a bow and smile, as though he were making some pleasant little remark. 'The fatigue of the journey, perhaps. You are better, and would like to see your rooms, madam? We have sent for the English doctor, but he is not yet here. You would like to see him in your room?'

Molly clings to me and caresses my hand as we go up the bare, unswept stairs. Was ever place so unwelcoming in the civilised world as this Spanish one? Slowly following the Englishman and the Spaniard, who seems to be the landlord, we pass the *salle-à-manger* on the first floor; it looks dark and haunted by flies. On the whitewashed walls we can see what appears to be the advertisement of a bull-fight. We go up another flight of stairs, and stop before a door. We wait till the landlord succeeds in unlocking it, and opens one half of it, and then we enter, Molly and I, and look round. It is a large

room, with a dusty red tile floor. It contains two beds in an alcove, and a table is in the middle of the room; against the wall there is a large worm-eaten sofa covered with faded green velvet. Everything is worn out and tawdry and uncomfortable. We go to the windows and look out. There is the Alameda stretching along the middle of the wide space between us and the opposite houses. On either side the Alameda are the broken-down carriages, the beggars, and the people who are not beggars and yet do not look one whit more cheerful than their less prosperous fellows. I think of the French people, and the Italians, and the Swiss, and wonder why these Spaniards look so different. There is a row of houses on the other side of the Alameda, but it is not picturesque; nothing is. As yet everything is ugly and disappointing, and I begin to think with dismay that this is not the place in which Molly will get well.

The landlord disappears, and I sit down on the faded sofa, and, taking Molly on my lap, try hard to keep back the tears that weakness and disappointment are forcing into my eyes. But this is foolish. We came for the sky, not for the houses or the furniture. Why should I lose heart because the streets are dusty and the rooms are ugly?

'Dear little Molly,' I say, 'we will be very happy here;' but do not quite believe myself.

In half an hour Dr. Murray comes, and as I look at him I feel thankful that we are not to be in his hands for the winter. He is older by ten years than the brother who has just arrived. He is tall and grave, with cold grey eyes and a well-shaved chin. He has a way of looking at you as though he could see you through and through, and he makes you feel while you are speaking to him, as if you were not altogether accurate, and that knowing this he coldly made allowance for it. For all this, there is something in his manner that impresses you with his skill; you dislike him, but you feel an unwilling confidence in his power. He asks what is the matter, and looks at me curiously and silently while I hurriedly tell him that nothing is the matter except that I have been tired, and have fainted from fatigue, I suppose, and anxiety about my child. I was always impatient of doctoring for myself, and never could take the trouble to carry out directions, but when I have been ill have always got well as best I could, and from mere strength of my own will.

Dr. Murray is apparently satisfied with my account, though I feel that he does not altogether believe it; he prescribes a tonic, and then he looks at Molly. He reads the letter I have brought from Dr. Finch, and says he will come with his brother to examine her to-morrow. It will be better that they

should do so together, as she is to be his brother's patient. He says, in a cold, confident voice, that a child's life is a thing never to be despaired of—which, while it shows that he recognises the gravity of Dr. Finch's report, gives me hope and courage. And then he remarks that we have come to the wrong hotel—that this is not the best place, though it is kept by respectable people; and I tell him how disappointing Malaga is as far as I have seen it, that it looks like the dreariest, ugliest place in the world for sick folk to get well in, and that I had hoped we should be in the country.

'Perhaps you would like Zahra better,' he says politely. 'It is a little place four or five miles from Malaga, along the shore. There is an inn there, quite Spanish, but comfortable and clean. A good many Spaniards stay there in the summer for the bathing, and English people have had a fancy for it last year and this. It is warm and sheltered, and there are some pretty walks, which there are not around Malaga.'

'Why do people come to Malaga?' I ask.

'Simply for the climate,' he answers. 'There is nothing else.'

'But we should be so far from a doctor if we went to this other place.'

'No, for my house is at Zahra,' he answers, 'and my brother will live in it this winter. I merely

come into Malaga every day, and at night if I am wanted they have to send a man on horseback after me.'

'And it is pretty?'

'It is interesting, as all places are where the Moors have been. I don't know, of course, if the Moorish traditions interest you; they do most people. Unfortunately, they have left few traces of any kind at Zahra. An old Welshman, Udal ap-Rhys, who described it in some travels he wrote a great many years ago, said it was a cultivated garden full of flowers and fruit, with a climate that was truly blessed; but this is no longer true of it, except in regard to the climate.'

'Why is this?'

He shrugs his shoulders, and looks as if he did not wish to be led into a discussion. 'The last thing a Spaniard does is to take care of the land,' he answers. 'But, as I say, it has a fine climate, and it is free from the dust and smells of Malaga. I will leave you to think it over, Mrs. Keith;' and he looks as if he wished to go.

'There are some English at the inn at Zahra?' I ask, anxious to be satisfied on that point.

'Fonda de Madrid it is called. Several English people are there: Lord and Lady Bexley, and some very nice people called Vincent.' Vincent? They are Alice Grey's friends.

'Is a Mr. Ralph Bicknell staying there?' I ask quickly, suddenly remembering my old playfellow, and thinking it would be pleasant to see him again.

Dr. Murray looks at me coldly for a moment, as if he disapproved of the question, though I do not know why he should. It makes the colour come to my face, not on Ralph Bicknell's account, but because of Dr. Murray's seeming disapproval.

'He may be,' he answers, 'but I don't know him by name. Several people have been there this winter. But you had better rest here for a few days, Mrs. Keith,' he says, in a distant, professional tone. 'To-morrow my brother and I will come and see your child.'

After he has gone, Miss Martin comes to the door to ask after Molly, and if she may help me to unpack. I refuse the offered kindness, but am grateful enough to her; and then Molly, standing by the window, cries out for joy at sight of a water-carrier, and the next moment something else takes her fancy, and she exclaims, 'Oh, mother, the ladies in the street have no bonnets on—only lace things, and they are so pretty.'

What a world of trifles it is. Passing a looking-glass, I lift Molly up in my arms and stand before it. We both look better, and suddenly I laugh out just as I did at Marseille, for the new hope is strong in me, and she looks as if she would get well. And

then all the world will grow bright again, and we shall be happy once more. It is not coldness, it is not forgetfulness, but I am so sated with sorrow; I am young and full of life, and my heart hungers and cries out for happiness, and longs for it as a starving soul for food. Get well, little Molly; get well, my sweet, and we will be happy together.

Molly is going to dine at the *table d'hôte* with the rest on this first evening. As we enter the dining-room the dark-haired Spaniards turn and look at her, and my knowledge of Spanish is enough to let me understand when one of them says that she is beautiful, and that her hair is like the sunshine. The other Spaniard says it is like her mother's hair, and I am as pleased to be admired once more as if all the world were before me still, and sorrow and I were strangers.

CHAPTER XII.

We are all at Zahra, Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin, Molly and I.

'Let us go at once, my dear Mrs. Keith,' Mrs. Greenside said, directly she was told of the place. It was odd how she fastened herself on to us at Malaga, as if she almost felt us to be some help and protection. She is a nervous, clinging woman, and evidently must lean on some one; it makes me think how terrible her widowhood must be to her. Yet it is strange that she, so many years older and so much richer than I, and not alone here as I am, for Miss Martin is with her, should find it any comfort to lean on a broken reed like myself. Poor thing! But I am glad to be of any comfort, even though it is ever so little, to some one in the world.

'Would it not be very dull for you at this little place?' I asked; 'and what would you do about your brother?'

'He would come to me at Zahra,' she answered, with her little confident smile, while her diamond rings flashed in the sunshine. 'He would come to me anywhere.'

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place for your sweet little child.'

'I must wait until Dr. Murray

have seen her,' I said. 'But don't let us keep you, Mrs. Greenside; we will come on to-morrow or the next day,' I added, thinking that there was no reason why she should wait for me.

'Oh no; I am too tired,' she answered. 'I ought to rest to-day; besides, I am so anxious to hear what they say about your little girl.'

Presently, almost against my will, and in spite of myself, I found that we were driving round Malaga, 'just to see what it was like,' she said. Somehow, she impressed me with the idea, as we drove along, that she was merely looking at the place with the eye of a person who would at some future time desire to talk about it if the opportunity offered, but from no other point of view, and with no other desire. That drive confirmed all that we had both previously thought of Malaga. The streets were as ugly as they had looked the day before; the only drive the man seemed to know was along the dried-up bed of a river. We jolted on in the sand, and over the stones at the foot of barren ranges, past prickly pears and straggling, neglected sugar-canes, in sight of grand outlines of forlorn-looking brown mountains, until our hearts grew heavy and our spirits sank.

'Oh, let us go back,' Mrs. Greenside said, and there was a sudden air of authority about her, in spite of her clinging manner; 'we will go back at once, Mrs. Keith.'

Without waiting for an answer, she told the driver to turn back. She insisted on paying for the carriage; I did not know why, but she did it as a matter of course, and when I offered her my share she pushed me away almost rudely. Taking no notice of the driver's attempts at extortion, she walked into the hotel with a languid air of suffering and determination, mingled with a visible satisfaction at not having been cheated as much as might have been expected, that was both curious and amusing.

'Take my things upstairs, Miss Martin,' she said, and went slowly up to her room, while the companion followed.

Molly and I followed too, and as we stopped at our own door Mrs. Greenside turned.

'Now, do go and get some rest, dear Mrs. Keith,' she said. 'I am sure you want it after that terrible drive, and let me know what the doctors say to your child. I shall be so anxious to hear. To-morrow we will go to Zahra; I dare say Dr. Murray would secure rooms for us.'

When we had meekly entered and shut the door, but not till then, she turned away from us.

While Molly rested on the green sofa, and I was impatiently waiting for the doctor and his brother, I wrote to the sardine, giving him various details of our journey, and, to amuse him, described Mrs.

Greenside, and told him how I had found out that she was a Jewess, but thought she was ashamed of it—for I knew that would make him laugh; and then I put aside my letter, in order to add a post-script after the doctor and his brother had been.

They came quite punctually. They examined Molly carefully, and consulted together, and then they came back to me, after I had carried Molly into Mrs. Greenside's room, so as to be alone to hear their verdict.

'Well?' I asked anxiously.

'Well,' Dr. George, as I call him, to distinguish him from his brother, said, 'you must cheer up, Mrs. Keith. The child is very delicate, but we cannot see why, with care and in time, she should not grow strong.'

They seemed such blessed words. I looked round, at the two little beds in the alcove, at the faded sofa, at the tops of the dusty trees that I could see out of the window, and wondered why the whole world had altered so suddenly, for nothing looked ugly or dreary now.

'You think she won't die?' I gasped. 'You think she may really live?'

They seemed half to repent their good words.

'We can't be certain, Mrs. Keith,' Dr. George said gently. 'We only say that she may outgrow her weakness;' and then he added, 'We are anxious

about you; we think you look so delicate. Have you any friends likely to come out to you here?'

'No, none,' I answered; 'but that doesn't matter. I shall get quite well if Molly does. I have only been over-worried.'

Dr. Murray was looking at me critically. 'I think she would be better at Zahra,' he said to his brother.

'We are going there if we may and can get rooms,' I tell them.

'I will go and look after them. At Zahra you will be near me, and I can take care of you.' Dr. George said, with a helpful look in his kind eyes. 'There are plenty of books in my brother's house, and Molly can come and gather oranges in the garden.'

Thus it was that we came to Zahra. We all came together—Mrs. Greenside, Miss Martin, Molly, and I. We were quite right to come, we saw that directly; it is a great improvement on Malaga. It is a very little place, just as the doctor said, but it is making a little struggle of its own to get into fashion. The Spaniards like it, and come in the summer to bathe—not many, but quite enough to suggest a future to any one with ambition or energy, though in this country it is doubtful if such an one is to be found anywhere. There is a beach, and a shady promenade above it; a wide street, a few

narrow ones, two or three smart *cafés*, and an inn. The last is in the wide street, opposite the chief *café*; it is not large, but clean and simple, and comfortable in spite of its bareness. There are three floors of rooms built after the Moorish plan round a patio, or covered courtyard. There are great palms growing in the patio; and beneath them, in the shade, are wicker chairs and divans. Our rooms are on the second floor and at the side, overlooking a narrow street. Opposite our windows is a church. The church is open all day long, and the bell, which has a slightly cracked sound that is not unpleasant, seems to ring at no stated times, but just when the fancy takes it.

An hour after our arrival, while I am still unpacking and worn out with fatigue, Miss Martin comes with a message from Mrs. Greenside. 'She is quite sure that I am tired, and will I bring Molly to afternoon tea in her rooms;' we are both glad enough, and accept gratefully. So we cross over to her rooms on the right-hand side of the house, and find that she has very large and comfortable ones, looking towards the sea. They must cost a good deal more than ours, I think to myself; but many things have made it evident that she is rich. There are all manner of pretty things and luxuries about—a brass kettle is over a spirit-lamp, and a teapot and a dainty afternoon service are put ready; they have

all evidently come out of the red plush-lined case standing near. The silver-gilt fittings of her dressing-case are lying about, and as I look at them I think that it is a good thing to be a Jew or a gipsy. They are the two races that somehow inherit the world. I have heard that the one is but the outcome of the other. I do not know how this may be, but it always seems that to the Jew belongs the inside of the world—the gold and jewels and stuffs, the gorgeous rooms and piled-up coffers; and to the gipsy belongs the outside—the sky and the sunshine, the tent on the grass, the merry road, and all the secrets of happy nature.

'Come, Mrs. Keith,' Mrs. Greenside says, in the rather protecting manner she is gradually putting on, for that of the drooping traveller is fast vanishing. 'I am sure you must want some tea. Now, you must sit in this chair. Miss Martin, put my two square down pillows behind Mrs. Keith's back.' It is no good protesting; besides, it is very nice to be made much of, and I, little used to it, find the strange sensation too pleasant to resist. 'I have seen your friends Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, Mrs. Keith.'

'But they are not my friends,' I interrupt; 'they are merely friends of a cousin of mine.'

'Oh, but people so soon make up an intimacy abroad,' she answers earnestly; and I find myself noticing that the odd thing about Mrs. Greenside is

that she seldom smiles and never laughs. Life seems to her a grave and important business, in which there is no time for frivolity, or for anything that is in a sense unworldly. 'They have a charming daughter; she has quite a beautiful walk. I am very glad I have come here; Malaga all but made me ill again, did it not, Miss Martin?'

'Yes, Mrs. Greenside; it did,' Miss Martin answers.

'And now, Mrs. Keith, tell me all about yourself,' Mrs. Greenside says, putting down her cup, and looking me full in the face, with the air of a sympathetic person who has a right to know all one's personal history, and will not be denied.

I tell her what there is to tell: that we are alone, that I worked, that Jack died, and why we have come abroad—all as briefly as possible, and then she is satisfied. I could almost fancy that, knowing all there is to know about us, we lose some of our interest for her, as a book that is read, or a piece of yesterday's news. I am very ungrateful, and I hate myself for not liking Mrs. Greenside more, and for not trusting her, for she is very kind to me.

Suddenly the man, the useful man who does all manner of things in the hotel, enters and hands me two letters. Doctor George has sent them to me from Malaga. He had promised to inquire if there were any, for the office opened at such uncertain

hours that it seemed useless to try and get them myself; besides, I hardly expected any. The man who brought them in asks if we would like to see some lace; a woman from the town beyond Zahra has brought some to sell.

While Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin bargain, I read my letters. They are from our two good friends; there is no one else to send us any. Mrs. Marshall writes a kind, cold letter, which is characteristic of her. She is going to Australia with her husband, on a visit to some of his relations, and does not expect to be back until the middle of next year, and she asks me to write to her at Melbourne and tell her how Molly is. The sardine sends a short note, but a kind one; it is characteristic also. He has had my letter from Marseille, and writes at once, for he knows 'how slow those Spanish beggars are, and letters take best part of a week to get anywhere in that lovely country.' He is glad we are getting along all right. He is pretty well, thanks; rather down in the mouth, but that doesn't matter. By the way, some friends of his are yachting somewhere about the Mediterranean. He doesn't know where they are likely to put in, but on a beggarly little sea like that they may turn up anywhere; so, if we should come across them, I can let him know. Then there is a postscript. 'Josephs is the name; you needn't say I told you to let me know. By the way,

I am going to Paris next month, so, if you want anything, only tell me, and I will start it from there.' So from this I gather that the friends who are yachting are interesting to the sardine, and I remember the remark about the little girl who 'did not seem to see it,' and wonder if she is on board.

'Surely it is the wrong time of year for yachting in the Mediterranean?' I say, as I watch Miss Martin fold up the lace they have bought and put it carefully away.

Mrs. Greenside is a little flattered, thinking that I am alluding to her brother, and she answers with apologetic pride, 'Oh, but they have a very large steam yacht, and my brother is so accustomed to her, he goes about in any weather.'

Suddenly an idea strikes me. 'What is your brother's name?' I ask.

'Josephs,' she answers, rather coldly.

'Is he the member for——?' I ask. It is strange how useful little odds and ends of memories are. I remember about three years since seeing the walls of —— placarded with 'Vote for Josephs,' but never even knew whether he was returned or not, for I am not a politician. My question pleases Mrs. Greenside, and she answers—

'Oh yes. He is exceedingly clever,' she adds. 'He might have been anything he pleased; but he never cared to go into Parliament till last year.'

She speaks as if he had only had to open the door and walk in; evidently her brother is a very remarkable man. I wonder if she knows Mr. Cohen; but perhaps it will be wiser not to ask. I remember the letter I posted from Malaga containing an account of Mrs. Greenside, and in it I mentioned that she expected her brother and niece. Then I do not see why I should conceal my acquaintance with the sardine; there is always something unpleasant about secrets.

'Mrs. Greenside, do you know Mr. Frederic Cohen, in London?' I ask. 'He lives in Princes Gardens.'

'Oh yes,' she says, in a slightly supercilious manner, and with the air of a person who knows every one, but only knows him as a matter of course. 'He was one of the young men who were in love with Helen last season.'

'Your niece?'

'Yes; but, of course, with her prospects it was impossible for anything to come of it.'

'He is very rich,' I say, thinking that money may be of some advantage in her eyes.

'Oh, but money really does not matter,' she answers loftily, 'for my niece will have a large fortune of her own. She is an only child, and her father is very rich. She ought to make a very brilliant match, with her accomplishments and sweetness of disposition.'

'I thought Mr. Cohen was related to some very old Jewish families?'

'Oh yes,' she answers, as if she did not think much of that. 'One of the Bowerings was very much in love with Helen last season,' she adds, as if to give me an idea that by a brilliant match she did not mean marrying among her own people. 'But he was a younger son; the eldest one is married.'

'And eldest sons are scarce compared to younger ones,' I remark, not quite knowing what to say.

'And so apt to throw themselves away,' she answers sadly.

'Mr. Cohen is very good and kind,' I tell her. 'He has been a staunch and generous friend to me.'

'I dare say he has, dear Mrs. Keith. I can quite understand his admiring you greatly.'

The colour comes to my face, for there is something unpleasant in her manner.

'He didn't admire me; he is very kind and good——' I begin quickly.

'No one could help admiring you,' she interrupts softly; 'and then, your sweet little child—no one could help being ready to do anything in the world for her.'

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN we go back to our rooms I look round them curiously. They are not so grand as Mrs. Greenside's, but they will soon be cosy and homelike. The sitting-room is large and pleasant (the bedroom leads from it); when my painting things are about, and the odds and ends from the bottoms of our trunks, and some cheap bright drapery that I saw in the shop windows as we came here is put up, it will look pretty enough. It has a large balcony, with an awning of matting over it, and that alone gives the room a character. The window is open, and the bell over the way is not ringing, so we sit and listen to the faint sound of the piano in the *café* opposite the front of the hotel. In the evening we now and then catch the twanging of a guitar; and there is a chant, half Eastern it sounds, that is already ringing in my ears, and has been ever since we entered Spain. It is sung by the gipsies, I think, and they must have known it these hundreds and hundreds of years. We shall spend many hours sitting by this window, looking out at the mountains that rise up beyond the

church. There are only a few houses on the open space to the left, but they and the sugar-canes and the esparto grass make up a foreground. Round the corner is the sea; when we are on the balcony we get a good view of it and the passing ships, though they are not many. There is a shady walk just above the beach, with seats beneath the trees. It will see us often, and Molly will drink in health as she breathes the balmy air; or, for a long walk, we can go to the place where the goats are kept, there Molly can rest awhile and have some milk. And when this does not content us, there are two or three rumbling flies, and we can drive out a mile or two towards the vega. All these things will make up our life in Spain. The doctor's house is close by, too —a pretty house with shaded balconies around it and a garden full of orange trees. The house itself is simple enough, but contains plenty of books, and the rough old man who is both cook and housekeeper has orders to admit us whenever we like, and to let us take away as many books and oranges as we please.

Zahra is so different from Malaga; coming to it is like getting into another atmosphere. The doctor said the Moors were here, and they must have been, seeing how near it is to the cities that were their chief centres; but, as he said too, there are few traces of them. I have looked down every corner, up at every house, hoping in vain to see some sign

or remembrance of them. Probably such irrigation as there is came from them, and what is left of vegetation here is owing to their first planting. Then the place has its name, which is surely Arabic; but for the rest all signs have vanished. I shut my eyes sometimes wondering if the street was here, and what it looked like hundreds of years ago in the days of the caliphs, and then in fancy I see it. There is a Moorish gateway at one end, and the horseshoe arch stands out clear and well defined; and, tall and erect and soft-footed, the conquerors come up the street, as if from a dream, and pass by into a dream again. I see the last gleaming whiteness of their robes, the last dark face with the turban above it vanish into the mist, and hardly realise even then that it is only my own foolish imagining. But here in Spain what strikes one most sadly of all is that the glory of the Moor is like a dream that was dreamed in Spain's brightest day, and that vanishing, left only the darkest night behind. But whatever this place may have been, it is now entirely Spanish. Of other things and other peoples in the past it seems to have no remembrance, and of them in the present no consciousness; it is given up to itself. No one speaks a word of any language but Spanish. Outside the hotel, there is not a foreigner of any description in all Zahra, except the doctor. They are all Spaniards of the lower middle class, or

peasants, indolent, narrow, and drowsy. The hotel itself is comfortable, and it is remarkable that there are only two women belonging to it, *i.e.* the landlady, and a woman who apparently comes in from her house a little way off, to act as chamber-maid in the morning and kitchen-maid in the afternoon. The landlady is a fat, vulgar, careless woman of five-and-forty, much taken up with her own flirtations, which are chiefly carried on with the proprietor of the tumble-down flies, a dirty-looking Spaniard known in the place as Don Carlos. However, luckily for her customers, Don Carlos is only able to devote the evening to her society, and during the rest of the day she looks fairly well after her business, which means that she laughs and scolds and bargains in the morning, and gossips and sleeps or walks along the promenade, with graceful lace on her head and well-developed figure, in the afternoon. With all this, however, we in the hotel are only amused. We get fair food and plenty of it, the rooms are kept fairly clean, and the rest is nothing to us. To me, in spite of the everlasting weariness and the occasional pain I cannot shake off, this life is almost happy, for in it there is the promise that Molly may get well. The idea has fastened on me that it will be so, and brightens every hour beyond all words to describe. And everything in the world seems to know it—the great hills and the sugar-canes, the

blue sky and the sunshine, the sea and the clanging bell opposite, the trees along the walk above the beach, the flowers in the doctor's garden; all these things jumbled up together and each one separately seem to know some happy secret concerning Molly, and the secret is that she will get well. Get well! It makes me laugh for joy to think of it. Oh, my dear ones who are gone, you would not grudge me my happiness? It is not forgetfulness of you; it is the thankfulness that one of you is left. Just one, and in her shall you live to me too, and through her shall all my world be full of contentment. It may be only the re-action of all the fear and pain, the natural coming of the light after the darkness, on which there is only again the darkness to follow; I do not know, and I dare not think.

At last everything is unpacked, I have bought the chintz and made some hangings, there are flowers from the doctor's garden in cheap pottery on the table, an easel is put up, the favourite books we brought and all the knick-knacks are put about. I look round at what is to be our home, and lift Molly up and kiss her and laugh, for all looks bright and sunny and pretty. I carry her to the window, and we sit down on the shady balcony to watch the people beneath and the little group of beggars around the church door opposite.

'Poor man,' Molly says; 'poor old man. Do

give him a penny, mammy dear. Throw him my penny.' So Molly's penny goes out to the brown old beggar man; and then we shift a little so as to see the street in front of the hotel, for, looking up to the right, we can see a good deal that is going on in it. This place serves as an excuse for a holiday to the people in the ugly, dusty one we have left, so twice a day we see the dirty omnibus from Malaga arrive. It rattles down the wide street, past the hotel, and farther on it stops at a little posada and stays a long time before its door, till the tired bony horses, harnessed together with rope, seem unable to fidget any more, and stand quite still, unheeding even the flies. This omnibus helps to give Zahra its air of festivity, for it is a happy, gay little place, and the water-carriers, with barrels decked with green boughs on their backs or slung on mules a pace or two in front of them, must drive a good trade or they would not call out as lustily as they do day after day.

I know all the people in the hotel by sight now, except Lord Bexley, who started on an expedition the day before we came, nearly a week ago now. So evidently Ralph Bicknell is not here, or I should have come across him; or, at any rate, have heard of him through Mrs. Greenside. Considering how small a party we are in the hotel, I wonder we have not made some acquaintance before this. One thing that keeps me apart from the rest of the

visitors is that I never go down to dinner, but always sit during the evening in my own room; so that, except during the luncheon-hour or out on the walk above the beach, I seldom come across them. Moreover, Mrs. Greenside has been so intent on getting intimate with every one, that I have rather hung back. I see the Vincents every day at luncheon. We have arrived at bowing to each other as we take our seats at table, but they are some distance from me, and I have not had the courage to make my cousin's knowing them an excuse for forcing my acquaintance on them. They consist of a tall, grey-haired papa, a rather French-looking grey mamma, and a pretty daughter. A very pretty girl is May Vincent. It is no wonder if Ralph Bicknell is in love with her. She is rather tall, and has a slight, round figure, supple and easy, as though she lived much out-of-doors. She has a sweet oval face, and soft eyes—blue, I think, though I can hardly tell for the changing light that is in them, and for the dark lashes that shade them—and she has dark brown hair that waves a little and droops low over her forehead as Clytie's did. She makes me think of Clytie, though the dimples in her face give it an air of sauciness that was quite unknown to Clytie's. There is something proud and strong about her, something in the light step and the graceful walk that first struck Mrs. Greenside—that suggests a character and a courage

that will prevent her life from being either tame or colourless. I never look at her without wondering what her future will be like, what manner of man she will marry, and whether he will be Ralph Bicknell. And yet withal she looks very soft and womanly, and as if she had the blindness and tolerance of most loving women; probably her life will be circumscribed as their lives mostly are. You have only to see her once to know that she possesses one thing—the unconscious courage of utter truthfulness. I have looked at her pretty head every day since we came, but never without feeling how easy it must be to love her; and when she turns her face towards Molly, there is an expression on it that makes my heart go out to her.

CHAPTER XIV.

To-day we make acquaintance with our neighbours. On a table in the patio, which serves as a lounge for every one in the hotel, there are some old English papers. Even to see them from a distance is fascinating; so after luncheon I summon courage to go and sit on one of the wicker chairs beneath the palms, close by them. Molly is on my lap curiously looking round and up at the great leaves above us. Suddenly Miss Vincent comes and speaks.

'I hope your little girl is better, Mrs. Keith?' she says; and then, half shyly, she asks, 'May I sit down by you?' and pulling another wicker chair up by mine, she begins to talk to Molly. Molly tells her about Marseille, and the lizard, and the ship, and all the wonders she has seen since she left home. When Miss Vincent has heard all about them, she turns to me and says, 'Mrs. Greenside has told us so much about Molly, we have all been longing to know her. She tells us, too, that you know some friends of ours, Mrs. Keith, and mamma has been quite curious to hear who they are.'

I wish Mrs. Greenside had not been so communicative; but it does not matter, so I tell her that Alice Grey is my cousin, and had desired to be kindly remembered to them if we met. Then she becomes quite excited, as people do abroad on hearing of their friends in England, and we are immediately as intimate as if we had been a month in the same house; so Alice Grey is of some use to us, after all. Miss Vincent tells me about a ball Mrs. Grey gave last season, and asks if I was there, and wonders why we did not see each other; but I tell her that I do not go to balls any more, and I think, but do not say so, that I did not even have the chance of going to this one.

'It was very nice,' she says. 'The most exquisite floor, and not too crowded. I think it is perfectly cruel to ask one to a ball and not give one room to move, don't you, Mrs. Keith? Molly, won't you come on my lap?' she asks coaxingly; 'oh, do.'

But Molly shakes her head, and says, 'No, thank you; I want to stay with mummy. Dear mummy,' she adds, kissing my dress.

'Very well,' Miss Vincent answers, with an offended air. 'I have a little guitar in my room which was bought at a very funny shop, near a beautiful palace in Granada, and I shall go upstairs and shut the door, and play "Three Blind Mice" all by myself.'

Molly is staring at her intensely, with wide-open blue eyes, and without taking any notice of the enticing remark about the guitar, says gravely, 'You have got dimples in your face.'

'You dear little thing. Don't you think they are very ugly? It is a sad thing to have little round holes in your face; worse than having them in your frock.'

'They're not holes, and they are not ugly,' Molly says stoutly. 'Can you play anything else besides "Three Blind Mice?"' she asks. Evidently the mice have made an impression on her though she does not want to show it.

'Come and sit on my lap and I'll tell you all about them,' Miss Vincent says; but Molly only shakes her head and hides her face against my shoulder. 'You little coquette; I won't have anything more to say to you. The blind mice wouldn't look at you if they knew you were so unkind to me.'

'Why, of course they wouldn't,' Molly answers, with severe common sense; 'blind mice can't look —can they, mother?' she asks doubtfully. Then it seems to occur to her that she ought to make some little return to Miss Vincent's overtures, so she remarks, 'We threw a penny out of the window today to a poor man.'

'I know another friend of yours,' I say, for Mrs. Greenside is coming along the corridor that leads to

the patio, and I know that our talk will soon be at an end—'Mr. Bicknell.'

'Do you?' and she looks up quickly, and with such keen interest on her face that it is easy to see that she knows him very well indeed.

'I thought he was with you, from what Alice Grey said.'

'So he is, only he has been on an expedition with Lord Bexley. He is coming back this very afternoon. Mrs. Greenside, do have my chair;' she gets up quickly, gives that lady her chair, and seizing two enormous cushions on the divan near, puts them one on the top of the other, and sits down upon them. 'Low seats are so comfortable,' she says.

Mrs. Greenside takes the chair with scarcely a word of thanks. She considers that girls are meant to give up to other people, and that unless they are married, and therefore at the head of an establishment, they are not worth considering. Miss Martin told me this accidentally. 'Mrs. Greenside dislikes unmarried people,' she said; 'that is, unmarried women. She thinks they are always in the way, and so very tiresome.' Mrs. Greenside turns to me, while the diamonds on her hands sparkle, and the heavy folds of her black silk dress, that never rustles, slowly arrange themselves.

'Mrs. Keith,' she asks, in her most earnest voice, 'tell me how your little girl is? I should have sent

Miss Martin to see, but she has been laid up with neuralgia, and every moment upstairs I have had to devote to writing to friends in England. They will be so anxious about me,' she adds plaintively. 'And do tell me how you are yourself.'

'Thank you, we are both much better, and delighted with this place.'

'I knew you would be,' she says, with a sigh of satisfaction, as if she had been the means of bringing us here. 'Miss Vincent, when are Lord Bexley and Mr. Bicknell to return?' I know that she has never seen either of them, so rather wonder at the interest in her tone; it amuses me to find, too, that Mrs. Greenside speaks to Miss Vincent in the tone of one who has known her for years and takes a grave interest in her affairs. 'Lord Bexley will be such an interesting man to meet,' she continues, as if to account for her inquiry. 'His book is charming; I have written to England for it.'

'I have not read it,' Miss Vincent says; 'but he and Mr. Bicknell are coming back this afternoon.'

'That is why Lady Bexley refused to go for a drive, perhaps. She is with your mother now. They are talking about their children.' The last words are said in a sympathetic but slightly impatient voice.

'Have you many brothers and sisters?' I ask Miss Vincent.

'No, not many: only two little brothers—they

are at school; and two little sisters—they are staying with mamma's sister.'

Mrs. Greenside looks up quickly. 'Are they half-brothers and sisters?' she asks.

'Yes; mamma is not my own mother,' she says gently; and, hesitating as if she thought it unkind to remember it, she adds, 'she is my father's second wife.'

Mrs. Greenside sighs. 'I hope my niece will never have a step-mother,' she says, with utter want of tact.

The girl looks up quickly, and answers, 'Perhaps no one can be quite like one's own dear mother, Mrs. Greenside; but I am very glad that papa married again. It would have been very sad and lonely for him without a companion: she has always been so very kind to me, and I love her and am very grateful to her for making my father happy. Mamma,' she says, as Mr. and Mrs. Vincent come out on their way to the street, and Lady Bexley follows them, 'mamma dear, what do you think? Mrs. Keith is a cousin of Mrs. Grey's, and she knows Ralph too.'

'I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Keith,' Mrs. Vincent says, holding out her hand as if she desired to be friendly; 'we have heard so much of Molly from Mrs. Greenside. You have come for the winter, I hear.'

'Yes,' I answer, grateful for her friendliness, and feeling less lonely already as we stand, Molly and I, in the midst of the pleasant little group in the patio.

'I feared your little girl was not so well yesterday as you did not come into luncheon, and we never see you of an evening. I hope you get some dinner?'

'Oh yes,' I explain; 'but it is brought up on a tray, and then I can read, and be near Molly in bed in the next room.'

'Let me sit with Molly this evening while you go down to dinner, Mrs. Keith,' May says.

'Or Miss Martin would,' Mrs. Greenside puts in.

'No, thank you,' I answer. 'I much prefer the simple tray and the open window to the long dinner and the hot room; but thank you very much.'

'You are quite right,' Mr. Vincent says, in the tone of one who feels it to be his duty to express his approval of a sensible arrangement, even though it is one he would not think of making for himself. 'Take my advice, and always escape a *table d'hôte* if you can. And so you know Bicknell?'

'Yes; I knew him a great many years ago, when I was a little girl. We were playfellows.'

'Very odd, to be sure, how things turn up,' he says. 'Come, Caroline; we must not keep Lady Bexley waiting any longer.'

'You see, Mrs. Greenside,' Lady Bexley says, in an apologetic, but very formal voice, 'Mrs. Vincent has persuaded me to go out, after all. I think really I was a little afraid of those terrible Spanish carriages, afraid to trust myself in one;' and she turns to follow the Vincents. But Mrs. Greenside is not by any means to be extinguished yet.

'Mr. Vincent,' she says, 'you seem to know everything. Do tell me how my brother will get here from Gibraltar. He would hardly bring his yacht in here. Do you suppose he would leave it at Gibraltar, and come by land; or take it to Malaga, and then come on? I don't know in which direction to turn my face to look for him.'

Mr. Vincent looks at her with a little odd smile, and his stiff iron-grey moustache looks extra wiry. He has a way of saying slightly rude things in a pleasant, patronising manner that people seldom resent.

'I should say you had better turn your face in the direction of the road,' he answers. 'He will probably leave his boat at Malaga, and drive over. What is his yacht called?'

'The *Flying Dutchman*.'

His tone is more respectful when he hears this. 'I know her. She's a fine craft; belongs to Josephs the Jew.' Mrs. Greenside is silent, and looks rather annoyed. It is odd how her pride in her relations

and her half shame of their persuasion struggle. 'He is a very clever man. What wonderful people the Jews are; I wish I had been one myself;' he adds.

Mrs. Greenside brightens up. 'Oh, he's very, very clever,' she says, with a long-drawn sigh.

Then Mr. Vincent suddenly looks at Mrs. Greenside, as if from a new point of view. 'And so Josephs is your brother?' and he looks at her still more closely, as if he expected to see a hook in her nose suddenly develop itself. 'Why, you must be one of the great people, too, then?'

She tries to answer proudly that it is so, but her voice hesitates a little. 'I suppose so, Mr. Vincent. But I wish I could say that I did wholly belong to them. My mother was not a Jewess. She was one of the Sherwins of Dorsetshire.'

'I don't know them,' he says.

'She was not strong, poor thing, and I fear I inherit her constitution. The Jews have such splendid physiques,' she says, determined to express some unqualified admiration of her father's race.

'Of course they have; and don't you know,' Mr. Vincent says instructively, 'that one proof of the Jews being the stronger race is, that if a Jew and a Gentile marry, the children are pretty sure to take after the Israelite'—she does not like this last word

at all—'and the Jewish blood will show itself even after several Christian generations? Ah, they are a wonderful people. I have a great respect for them. Come, Lady Bexley; come, Caroline.' And they all three slowly sally forth.

'May I come with you, Mrs. Keith?' Miss Vincent asks, as we get up, and she takes Molly's hand. She stops to say good-bye when we get to our door, but I ask her to enter and see our rooms, and she assents joyfully. 'Oh, what a nice room,' she cries, and wanders round, looking at the books and the little scraps of adornment. 'And there is Molly on the easel. What a sweet portrait, what a pretty thing she looks!' She laughs, and her laughter seems to make the whole room bright and happy. 'Mrs. Greenside told us you painted. She is a very old friend of yours, isn't she, Mrs. Keith?'

'Oh no,' I answer, in surprise. 'I only met her on board the boat. She is very kind,' I add, for my conscience pricks me for not liking her well enough.

'Yes, indeed she is,' the girl says eagerly; 'I am sure of that, only Lady Bexley has taken a dislike to her, and papa makes fun of her. I only hope Ralph won't also take a dislike to her, for he is so rude to people when he does; it is very awkward sometimes.'

'Yes, it is very awkward,' I answer absently, noticing how her face lights up when she mentions him; and then I make her sit down on the rocking-chair, and she turns it round a little so that she can look up at Molly's portrait as well as out at the open window. She waits half impatiently for me to speak. I know perfectly that she wants me to talk about Ralph, and that my old acquaintance with him is the chief cause of my sudden attraction for her.

'Do tell me how you knew Ralph,' she says at last. 'It is odd I never heard him talk of you; but he never does talk much about people.'

'I have not seen him since we were both children,' I answer; 'we were playfellows together.'

'How nice. And did he bully you?' she asks merrily. This girl, in the full tide of youth and beauty and happiness, fascinates me; I sit opposite and look at her, it seems as if from across the world.

'Yes, he did,' I answer, amused at the question; and ask in turn, 'does he bully you?'

'Indeed he does,' she says, with a laugh and a sigh together.

'Did he give you that?' I ask, pointing to a little half hoop of diamonds on her third finger.

She nods uneasily, and evidently does not want to talk about it.

'It doesn't mean anything,' she says quickly. 'Oh yes, he is very masterful,' she goes on. 'He

thinks that women like masterful men; but I think he would be just as nice, much nicer, if he didn't always want his own way. I should know that I had mine sometimes only because he pleased to let me have it.' Then, as if she had suddenly remembered something, she says, 'Perhaps I shouldn't say this to you, Mrs. Keith, only you don't seem like a stranger, you knew him so long ago. Was he a nice boy?'

'Yes, very.'

'I think he must have been,' she says, with a sigh; and then she looks up and says, 'He is very nice now, though he is disagreeable sometimes.'

'So he was as a boy,' I say. 'When I offended him he used to pinch me,' at which she laughs out joyously.

'Did he?' she exclaims. 'That is just like him. Of course he can't pinch people now, but he punishes you dreadfully if you offend him.'

'Do you ever offend him?'

'Oh yes, sometimes, I suppose. But I must go. Mrs. Keith, I wonder if you would come and have some tea in our room presently? He will be back by five o'clock, and I am sure mamma would be glad to see you.' But I shake my head.

'Not this afternoon,' I say; 'but perhaps you and Ralph—Mr. Bicknell, I suppose I must call him—will come and see me for an hour this evening. I think I must rest for a little while now.'

'You look very tired,' she says gently. 'Would you not like to be a little while alone and quiet? Perhaps Molly would come with me for a bit. Will you, dear?'

'I'll be very, very quiet,' Molly says beseechingly, 'but I do want to stay with mother;' and she creeps into my arms and lies quite still.

A few hours later, just after the dinner-bell has rung, May Vincent taps softly at the door and comes in again. Her eyes are bright, and her face is flushed with happiness. A bunch of scarlet flowers is in her waistband.

'Are you better, Mrs. Keith?' she asks.

'Yes, I am better,' I answer.

'Ralph remembers you perfectly. He says you were so pretty and such a sweet little girl, and he means to fall in love with you over again.'

'That is very kind of him:' and I try to laugh. 'But I fear it must not be to-night, dear, for I am very tired. I think I must lie down when Molly goes to bed.'

'I am so sorry—I am so sorry,' she repeats softly, touching my hand. 'Let us come to-morrow night. We are going for a picnic all day. You are not strong enough to go with us?' I shake my head. 'I will steal in for a moment, if I may, before I go to bed to-night, just to see if I can do anything for you. Molly, you shall have one of these scarlet

flowers; Ralph brought them from the mountains; dear little Molly, and there is a kiss for you. Now keep still by mother.' And with the happy smile lighting up her beautiful face, she goes down to meet her lover.

CHAPTER XV.

THIS morning all sense of weariness has gone. Molly looks well, though the doctor looks at her, as he always does, with an anxious expression on his face; it seems sometimes as if he understood all the past, and in some dim way held the secret of the future. But it is a rest and comfort to hear his voice; he is a man in whose presence it seems as if nothing can go very far wrong; it gives one strength to see him. He comes in slowly, and quite naturally taking Molly on his knee begins to talk with her, a little happy, trivial conversation such as children love. When it is over he looks round the room and admires it, and going up to Molly's portrait on the easel sees the good points and the bad ones and remarks on them. 'I ought to get you some commissions from the Spaniards,' he says. 'I do not know the people here very well as yet, but I will find out about them. As yet all Spaniards disappoint me; they are so apathetic.'

'Apathetic?' I say, in surprise.

'They are passionate,' he explains, 'but they are forgetful, as passionate people usually are; and seem capable of no sustained feeling. Lord Bexley was saying this only last night.'

'Is Lord Bexley interesting?' I ask.

'He is pleasant and full of fun,' he answers. 'I only saw him last night, when he seemed to be a little inclined to make fun of Mrs. Greenside. I am afraid she lends herself rather easily to it; but she is a very kind person.' I notice that Dr. George, as he is called by every one here, always sees the best side of people. 'By the way, Mrs. Keith, I have been wondering if you would care to have a piano in your room. There is my brother's, and it is spoiling for want of use. Why shouldn't you have it over here?'

'It would be very nice,' I answer; 'but your brother—perhaps he would not like it to be moved.'

'Oh yes; I asked him about it before he started, and he said I could do what I liked with anything in the house. I'll have it brought over, and Molly shall play to me next time I come.'

'Mummy plays best,' Molly says; 'and she sings, but not like Jack. Jack used to sing lovely songs, and rock on the rocking-horse.'

He has been told about Jack before, so he makes no answer; only kisses her and lifts her gently off his knee, and gets up to go.

'Do the Spaniards grieve very much when anyone belonging to them dies?' something makes me ask.

'They accept all the inevitables with dignity,' he answers, 'never rejoicing or grieving over-much. But I must go. I think Molly is doing very well. Keep her out-of-doors.' He is shaking hands with me, when Mrs. Greenside enters. She is delighted to get hold of him.

'I am so glad to see you,' she says, in her heavy, earnest manner. 'What an interesting talk you had with Lord Bexley last night. He is a delightful man.'

'He is very pleasant,' the doctor answers, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Now, do tell me about Mrs. Keith. Don't you think she is very fragile?' she asks suddenly.

'I am quite well,' I say emphatically.

'She is so devoted to her child,' Mrs. Greenside sighs.

Dr. George sees that I do not want the subject continued, so adroitly changes it.

'When are your relations coming, Mrs. Greenside?' he asks. Every one in the hotel takes an interest in Mrs. Greenside's relations.

'To-day. I have just had a telegram, and wanted to tell Mrs. Keith at once, for I knew she would sympathise with me. She understands a

sensitive nature like her own;' and Mrs. Greenside sighs again.

'I am very glad they are coming; it will be a great pleasure to you,' he says.

'Oh yes,' she answers, with another long-drawn sigh, as if no words can measure the happiness it will give her. 'I hope you and my brother will be great friends,' she adds earnestly. 'He delights in clever men.' The doctor's eye twinkles again.

'I shall be very glad. But now I fear I must say good-bye. Then, I'll send the piano over, Mrs. Keith;' and he escapes.

'I am so glad to hear your good news, Mrs. Greenside. How did it come?' I ask her.

'Oh, they telegraphed the moment they knew where I was, and said they would start immediately,' she says, as if she wondered whether I had expected they would do anything else. 'How charming you have made your room. You have so much taste.' And then she stands before Molly's portrait, and seems charmed by it. 'It is a great thing to have your talent, Mrs. Keith,' she says—'a most precious thing. I wonder if, when you feel stronger, you would take a commission from me to paint my niece? I would give anything to have a portrait of her; not a full-size one, but one like this of Molly. Oh, there is Miss Martin. Miss Martin, do come and look at this portrait.' Miss Martin comes slowly into the

room and shuts the door; she stands before the easel for a few minutes.

'Yes, it is very nice; it is very like,' she says gently, and goes to the window. It is an odd characteristic of Miss Martin that whenever it is possible she looks out of window.

'I am glad you like it.' I feel chilly as I speak, and wrap a little black shawl over my shoulders, saying that it is cold.

'Oh, you are not well,' Mrs. Greenside says, with great concern in her voice. 'I could see you were not well the moment I entered. Miss Martin, where is my white Shetland shawl?'

'It is in the Indian trunk.'

'Will you please get it?' and Miss Martin goes off obediently. 'Mrs. Keith, you ought really to speak to the doctor about yourself.'

'It is only the reaction after all the worry,' I answer. 'But I will speak to him if I do not get stronger.'

'You must, indeed.'

'He is so very kind——'

'And he is devoted to you; I could see that on board the ship.'

'Devoted to me?' I say coldly, the blood going from my face, for I feel that she is making it impossible to ask personal advice from him. 'He is not more devoted to me than to any one else.'

'Oh yes, he is,' she says earnestly.

'You must not say that,' I answer; 'please never to say that again, Mrs. Greenside, either to me or to any one else.'

'But, my dear Mrs. Keith, why should I not say it, and how can he help admiring you?' Her tone worries me more than I can say.

'Oh no, indeed; it is all a mistake. Please never think anything of the sort again; it is cruel and untrue——'

And suddenly the door opens, and Philip the doctor's man and Don Carlos the landlady's friend appear, bringing in the piano, and the former has a basket of fresh oranges for Molly, which Doctor George has sent. Mrs. Greenside looks at me, but before she can make any remark, Miss Martin returns with the shawl. Don Carlos says that señora Manuela (the landlady) will come presently to see that the piano is placed as I like, and he bows and departs with Philip.

'Mrs. Keith, have you one of these shawls? Mrs. Greenside asks, holding up a soft white Shetland one, so fine that it looks like lace. 'Then, you must have this—you must indeed. Let me give it to you——'

'But indeed, Mrs. Greenside, I do not feel the cold, and I do not like to take so beautiful a thing——

'Oh, but you must,' she says. 'It was given to

me by a very sweet woman two hours before she died. She was very dear to me, and I tried to save her life just as if it had been my own, did I not, Miss Martin?'

'Yes, Mrs. Greenside, you did,' Miss Martin answers, still looking out of window, with her face turned in the direction of the sea.

'And she died?' I ask Mrs. Greenside, with a shudder. Somehow the history of the shawl fascinates me.

'Oh yes, she died,' Mrs. Greenside says, in a voice of compassion, but as if dying had been a matter of course: 'and the last time I saw her, she took this shawl off her shoulders and put it on mine. I never saw her afterwards, and I have never worn it since, and now I want you to have it. You won't mind accepting it as a token of my great admiration for your courage in coming all this way alone with your child.'

'But there is nothing to admire in that. It is only what any mother would do.'

'All mothers would not feel so,' she sighs; 'but, dear Mrs. Keith, your little child is so sweet I do not wonder at your devotion to her.' And so in a minute she makes me grateful. Suddenly Miss Martin turns from the window; I fancy that there are tears in her eyes, but it must be only fancy.

'Mrs. Keith,' she says, 'Mrs. Greenside does not

want me just now. Shall I take your little girl for a walk?' I look at her in surprise. She is generally too much like a machine to think of this kind of thing. 'Perhaps you are not well enough to go out yourself to-day,' she says; 'you look very tired.'

'I want to stay with you, mother,' Molly pleads.

For some unknown reason I cannot bear to refuse Miss Martin's offered kindness.

'I wish you would go, darling. You might gather some flowers for me,' I say; and she assents. So I tie on her little white calico hood, and she goes off in the sunshine with Miss Martin towards the walk by the sea.

'Have the Vincents made up their picnic?' I ask Mrs. Greenside.

'Yes,' she answers. 'The Vincents and Lord and Lady Bexley, and that Mr. Bicknell.'

'Tell me what Mr. Bicknell is like.'

'He is nothing remarkable,' she answers. 'But no doubt the Vincents are anxious to see their daughter married. Girls are great responsibilities until they are married; they are like trees waiting to be planted.'

'But you are not anxious to see your niece married?' I say maliciously.

'Oh, but she is like my own child; and I should be glad to see her married too, only I feel that so few young men of the present day are worthy of her.

I shall bring her in to see you as soon as she comes, if you are not downstairs. Sometimes when you are tired you must make her play to you,' she adds.

'Is she very musical?'

'Oh yes,' she answers, in a tone that signifies that as a matter of course she is everything. It is quite certain that Mrs. Greenside is very staunch to her relations; it is impossible to help liking her for it.

I wonder a great deal what Miss Josephs will be like, and whether she cares for the sardine, and if people here will take kindly to Mrs. Greenside's relations, for they do not care much about her. They will stay three or four weeks at least, Mrs. Greenside thinks, and the only thing that appears to disturb her is that Lord and Lady Bexley are going away soon. They (the Bexleys) want to go back to Italy, to a villa they have somewhere near Bordighera, and where they expect friends from England immediately after Christmas. 'Of course, my brother will delight in meeting Lord Bexley,' Mrs. Greenside explains; 'he is so very interesting, and full of information.'

When Molly comes back, Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin go away together, and leave me with the remembrance of their kindness, and with the dead woman's shawl about my shoulders. As they

go out of the door, Molly runs after Miss Martin and puts her arms round her neck and kisses her.

'Take me out again another day,' she says.

Miss Martin colours, and says in her mechanical manner, 'I will, if Mrs. Greenside can spare me;' and follows her employer from the room.

It takes me by surprise; she took no notice of Molly on board ship, and has no ways that please a child. I wonder what has happened, and yet I do not like to question Molly; it would seem like looking into some recess into which I am not meant to see. But Molly soon tells me all about it of her own accord.

'Oh, mummy dear,' she says, 'we went a little way, and sat down and looked at the ships, and then Miss Martin began to cry because her brother had gone a long way across the sea and hadn't said good-bye to her. And then I told her about Jack, and how he used to sing; and then she told me that once her brother was a little boy, and she used to love him very much, and they used to have all manner of games together, but now he is a man, and it isn't half so nice as when he was a little boy; and then she cried, and I didn't know what to do, so I cuddled her up and kissed her and told her not to cry, and she called me a little darling.'

'Poor Miss Martin.'

'Yes; and she has got a little tiny penknife in

her purse, and it has been there ever since her brother was a little boy——'

She stops and looks tired and faint; the fatigue has been too much for her. I take her on my lap to rest, and soon she is asleep; but her breathing is short, the fever burns on her face, and for a moment all the old fears come back.

The landlady enters to arrange a place for the piano; she looks at Molly carelessly, and shrugs her shoulders. She dislikes children, and it is an unfortunate thing that the only woman-servant in the house seems also to dislike them. Señora Manuela stops before Molly for a moment with a curious expression on her face.

'Ah!' she says, 'she will never be strong. It is no use wishing the weak to live. What are they to do with life?'

'One's own child,' I answer, while my heart turns cold.

'It is not oneself, but one's child, for whom you should desire what is best,' she says, with another shrug of the shoulders. 'Life is not always best;' she looks at me and laughs, as if to let me see that she says it from no ill feeling, but from calm, philosophical foresight. 'My sister had a child; it was ill for three months,' she goes on. 'Ah, poor dear! it was a good thing when it died; it is no good living to bear pain.' She says all this more to her-

self than to me as she leaves the room. The door does not fasten easily: without thought of the sleeping child, she rattles the catch, and finally bangs the door.

Molly awakes with a start, and looks about her. 'Poor Miss Martin! I am so sorry for Miss Martin's little brother, mummy,' she says, and closes her sweet eyes again; when she is once more asleep, I carry her into the next room and put her gently down on the bed, and sit beside her and watch. She is still sleeping when, two hours later, Mrs. Greenside taps at the sitting-room door again, and enters with a girl beside her.

'Mrs. Keith,' she says, 'this is my niece. She is very tired with her journey, but I wanted her to come at once to see you and your little Molly.'

I look at the girl curiously. She is fair and pale. She has a long nose, soft grey eyes, and pretty light hair twisted round her head, much in the fashion that I wear mine. I notice instantly that she has very beautiful hands. She wears a simple black gown, and no ornaments of any kind. I say some polite words of greeting, and as she looks up I see, almost with surprise, the sweetness of the smile that lights up the shy, grave face.

'I am very glad to meet you,' she says. 'My aunt has told me of your kindness to her. I hope I

may come and see your little girl to-morrow, when I am rested.'

She says it in a low musical voice that makes me long to hear her speak again; but she seems a little frightened, and looks at me with a look that says, 'Let me go away,' and I do not try to keep her.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is half-past eight. Molly is asleep, my dinner-tray has gone down, the window is open, and I can hear the piano going in the *café* opposite. Just now the last omnibus rattled past the corner, on its way back to Malaga. I wonder it goes safely along the rough, unlighted roads; but these Spanish mules have a safe and sleepy instinct that carries them anywhere without stumbling. The queer old man who serves as waiter and general attendant during the latter half of the day, brings in the lamp and a little pile of papers Dr. George has sent over, thinking I should like to see them; but I am too tired to drag myself from the lumpy cushions even to read the news from home. I fear sometimes that I am growing stupid; things are becoming a little blunted all round. I cannot think, or read, or work, or care for things as keenly as formerly; all my longing is just to get on to this sofa and rest, just to know that Molly is well, or that she is sleeping peacefully in the next room, then all the world and all it has may slip by.

But this is just a passing phase; life is not so feeble that it cannot struggle against it, and all the hopes and longings and ambitions will come back. This place, in which we are strangers, and in which the few people we know are happier and stronger and better than ourselves, throws me back on myself too much, and deepens the shadows in my lot. In England it was easy to find so many poor and sick and sorrowful, longing for sympathy, and aching even for such little help as I could give, and in sight of their lives it was impossible to cry out at one's own griefs, almost impossible not to lose remembrance of them, to a certain extent, in the longing and eagerness to enter into their lives, and to help them and comfort and make them, even for ever so small a space, a little happier and brighter, a little freer from pain, a little less cold and hungry. But here one is thrown on oneself so sadly, and above all things is alone. To some men it might perhaps be best, but to a woman it is terrible. But this feeling will pass. What slaves we are to the lower side of ourselves, and how flesh and blood can master us! A little pain, a single blow, a little derangement of so many atoms, a little failure in the mere mechanical working of our bodies, and the strongest and the weakest are on the same level; and genius, and intellect, and learning, and noble aspirations, and all longings and strivings, where are they?

Some one in the street beneath passes by, singing the gipsy chant, or what I take to be the gipsy chant. It seems as if my soul goes out to follow the voice down the dim street, along by the trees towards the still sea, over the uneven ground with the rough stones and the tracks of sand. I can feel the cool breeze blowing. I look up and see the steelly blue of the sky, and far away at sea there is a light, and over the waves I go—the smooth, cold waves that have but little foam on them, and that climb and roll over and over each other from sheer restlessness, as people toss in their sleep; for in this still wind and beneath this blue sky they do not seem to be alive with all the life that is theirs in the storm, or with the joyousness that is theirs in the sunshine, and they are not full of all the strange memories that moonlight gives them. They do not know that I am going on and on, and over and over them wave after wave, towards the ship at sea. I go softly, and the little breeze hurries me on so secretly. How warm it will be on board! how cozy and bright in the saloon, with the passengers all about, and the lamps, and the books, and the bright glasses above the table, and the sound of the screw as we go on and on towards the land. What land? Oh, tell me this! what land is it they are going to? Not a strange land, but the dear one in which the woman lying on the sofa at Zahra played when she

was a little girl, among the fields at Minehead; the land in which her best loved was carried home with the water dripping from his hair: the land in which her little son lies sleeping. I wonder what the bride is doing in St. John's Wood, and if she understands the picture on the easel yet; if she ever looks at it, and thinks of the people who walked round and round the trim garden before it was all overgrown with rank tall grass, and the seaweed was piled up on the shore lower down, and—— But some one is here. Ah yes, I understand; I am the woman at Zahra, and the woman in the dream is gone; she is not me, and I do not know where she may be. She is some poor soul who comes and rests in my body awhile, and goes out on strange journeys, and whispers them all into my dreaming ears, and then is gone again. I get up and smooth my rumpled hair. It is very golden, I think as I look in the glass—a pale, bright gold, like the sunshine of an early summer day. I pour some eau-de-cologne on the top of the mass of plaits, just to awaken me, and then open the door.

'I was half asleep,' I say. 'Come in; I am so glad to see you both;' and May Vincent enters, followed by a man. The man is fairly tall and well made; he has brown eyes and dark brown hair, and he is distinctly good-looking.

'Dear Mrs. Keith,' May says *gently*, but in a

happy, satisfied voice, 'I have brought Ralph to see you.'

'How do you do?' he says, and looks at me for full a quarter of a minute, shaking my hand, as if while he did so he thought of all the bygone days. 'How strange we should come across each other at last. I have often thought of you.'

They come in, we gather round the open window, and by the dim lamplight he and I look at each other again, long and curiously, across the memories of all the years that have passed since we met.

'Why, we used to see each other nearly every morning;' he laughs, and I wonder if he is thinking of the kiss we climbed up the fence to give each other the day we parted. He has a merry laugh, and his face lights up and is at its best when he is amused.

'I remember it all so well,' I say; and we look at each other again. It is so strange to meet as man and woman, we who have always thought of ourselves as children together, whenever we thought at all.

'You were rather a pretty little girl, Maggie.' I almost start; it is so long since any one called me by that name. 'May tells me you contemplate calling me Mr. Bicknell,' he remarks, as if he understood how odd the sound of my own name had been to me.

'People contemplate many things they never do,'

I answer; and then we talk the old days and haunts of childhood over, wondering if it be really true that we are grown-up people now.

'I asked Mrs. Keith if you used to bully her, Ralph, and she assures me that you did,' May says, when we have laughed over our old squabbles. 'I believe you were a very disagreeable boy.'

'Do you, miss?' he answers grandly, just in the manner he used to answer me years ago. It brings mornings in the fields and games in the wood all back before my eyes with a rush. 'I never bullied any one; I was particularly amiable when I was a boy, as I am now,' he adds solemnly.

'Oh!' she cries.

'I believe we used to be sweethearts,' he says, looking at me with another laugh.

'Then the sweetness was all on my side,' I answer, rather ungraciously; but I am thinking of his pinches.

'And the heart too,' he answers; 'for you certainly had mine in those days.'

'I did not deserve so pretty a speech as that,' I reply humbly.

'That is so like you,' he says; and then he turns to May. 'She always used to acknowledge when she was wrong, even in a trifle. She was very humble and repentant when she had offended me.'

'Well?' she says.

'Well,' he echoes, 'why don't you repent when you offend me, and acknowledge when you are wrong?' They are just like big boy and girl together; it is very curious to watch them.

'So I do,' she says, after a moment's hesitation; 'I always do. I am too proud not to do so. Only a coward is afraid to make amends, or to own when he is in the wrong.'

She looks proud enough as she says it; her voice is eager, and her eyes are raised to his for a moment. He looks at her, and then at me, and then at her again; and I know perfectly that he is thinking how beautiful she is, and that there is a beautiful nature behind those fearless eyes. He is thinking, too, how bright she is, with her youth and happiness and utter unconsciousness of sorrow; and I do not know why, but I feel somehow that he is resolving in his heart that he will guard her from all the sorrow and pain that have set their mark for ever on me. He turns from her and looks at my hands. They are lying on my lap, little thin white hands, with the wedding-ring so loose that it slips, and would fall off but for the band of pearls that guards it. Then he looks up at my face, and while I know that he is sorry for me, I feel it is less on account of all I have suffered than for the traces it has left.

'It is so strange to meet you again,' he says gravely. 'I can hardly believe it is you, and that

you—you have been married and have children; only one child, though, is it?'

'One now; there were two.'

'Why, it's twenty years since we met. You must be nearly thirty, Maggie.'

It is not a wise speech to make to a woman. Happily I do not mind it.

'It must be quite twenty years,' I answer, 'for I was thirty a month ago.'

'Were you, Mrs. Keith?' May exclaims. 'You look about seven-and-twenty; Mamma was saying so to-night. Why, you are only two years younger than Ralph.'

'Yes, it is very odd to meet as old fogies,' I say to him, looking across the girl between us.

'I don't feel in the least like an old fogie,' he answers.

'Neither do I.'

'There is not the least occasion to get old unless one chooses,' he says. 'I intend to be as independent of Time as the world itself, which gets young again every year.'

'And old also,' I add maliciously.

'We'll forget that side of the argument,' he laughs. 'Is that your child's portrait?' he asks; he gets up and examines it critically. 'It is rather well done,' he says, with some hesitation, as if he had half expected it to be badly done, and is surprised.

'Do you think she is pretty?' I ask, for he has said nothing about Molly's face, and yet I have caught its sweetest, dreamiest look.

'*It is* a nice little face,' he answers;—'children are a great deal alike, you know,' he adds, with a little laugh, as if he thought the remark a joke.

'We are here for her health's sake,' I tell him. 'She is not strong.'

'So May said;' but he does not add a word of sympathy. 'I wonder Bournemouth, or some of those places, would not have done as well for her,' he remarks, in a voice that gives me to understand that he really thinks the coming here to have been over-great an effort to make for so young a child.

'Do you like children?' I ask him, as I put the easel a little on one side.

'I do not think I do particularly,' he answers; 'but I shall like to see your little girl;' and then he says gently, 'I thought of you, Maggie, when I saw your father's death in the paper years ago. I should have written, only I did not know whether you would remember me; or where you were.' May is some little distance off while he speaks, and seems not to hear what he is saying.

'Thank you, Ralph,' I say gratefully. 'Do you remember him well?'

'Perfectly,' he answers, 'and can see him riding along the Minehead lanes now. He always sat bolt

upright, and had a way of looking over the hedges as he went along, as if he expected to drop on a poacher.'

There is a frank manliness and a certain simplicity about him as he speaks; I begin to understand why May likes him. Suddenly I hear Molly coughing uneasily in her sleep, and go to her. As I leave the room a guitar is twanging in the street, and they step out on to the balcony to listen to it.

I stay a few minutes with Molly, arranging her pillow and listening to her breathing, and gently smoothing her soft hair. It is a comfort to be with her again after the hour's absence, and they will not miss me in the next room. I sit and think of all that life has given me since the days when Ralph and I were playfellows, and am thankful enough for my lot, even for all the sorrows—that they have been mine to bear, and not another woman's.

Presently, when Molly is sleeping soundly again, and has ceased to cough, I go back to my visitors. They are still on the balcony, and do not see me for a moment. I hear Ralph say, 'You little goose,' and he puts his hand on her shoulder just for a moment, but she shakes it off. I cannot quite make them out. They are evidently very fond of each other; there seems to be some understanding between them, and yet they do not seem to be exactly engaged. May looks round and sees me.

'Do come on the balcony, Mrs. Keith,' she says; 'it is so lovely.'

So I go out; a clock close by begins to strike, and a bell rings out in the distance; we hear a man's voice singing, and listen till it dies away. We stand silently looking at the stars and the sky, and the white church opposite; far beyond we see the twinkling lights at sea—not many, only two or three perhaps, but they set me journeying into the far-off again, and I think of the picture on the easel, and the rocking-horse in the nursery, and of the little bride, and wonder if she is laughing. I must not forget to write to poor nurse to-morrow. When we left England she was broken-hearted at all that had happened, and was going to Germany, to her son's wife.

May gives a long sigh. 'The world is very lovely,' she says softly, 'if people were only worthy of it.'

'And pray, who is unworthy?' Ralph asks, evidently rather astonished at the remark.

She laughs a little. 'You and I, perhaps,' she says.

'I don't feel particularly unworthy,' he answers.

'You self-righteous person,' she says reproachfully; and then she adds, 'I promised Lord Bexley to remind you of the billiards at nine o'clock, and nine o'clock struck half an hour ago.'

'Then why didn't you remind me half an hour ago?'

'Don't speak in a masterful tone, sir. I told Mrs. Keith that you liked being masterful.'

'Did you?' he answers, in a still more masterful manner. 'You seem to have been amusing yourself by abusing me to Mrs. Keith to your heart's content.'

'Not to my heart's content at all,' she says, with merry mock humility, 'but quite the reverse, indeed. Alas, alas.'

'Why didn't you tell me when it was nine o'clock, miss?'

'An' please, sir, we found your company so pleasant I thought it would be a pity to lose it,' she answers saucily; at which he laughs and gives his head a little toss, and says he wishes she would learn to treat her elders with respect.

'Respect!' she laughs. 'It is so absurd to expect respect, isn't it? When you are at home and official, then it is quite different.' She does not explain what she means, and I do not like to ask.

'I can't fancy Ralph official,' I say.

'Can't you?' he says absently. 'Well, I shall have to go back soon, I fear, and then you must fancy it if you think of me at all.' He looks at May again for a minute. 'I am teaching her Spanish,' he says.

'And scolds me dreadfully,' she interrupts. 'But I am stupid, and he will go to such very difficult writers.'

'We have been learning some maxims in the "Conde Lucanor." Let us see, May; what was it you stumbled over so long? 'Quien te alabare con lo——'

'I won't listen,' she cries merrily, and stuffs her fingers into her ears. 'I am not in school to-night.'

'Obstinate thing!' he exclaims; and then they wish me good-night, and he asks if he may come again, 'without this frivolous young person,' looking at May with an expression in his eyes that must surely satisfy her; and then they go away together, laughing and chattering down the staircase like a couple of merry school-children. I listen to their voices curiously; they are like an echo that has travelled on through all the years.

How strange it has been to meet him again. I sit down to wonder a bit about all that is between them, and how it will end; but instead, I find my thoughts going off to the old days at Minehead—not to the days when Ralph and I were boy and girl together, but to the days when my husband first came to the inn to paint. He was there a whole summer, and we knew him only by sight; but when he came a second summer, my father thought he

had earned a right to be recognised and, having made acquaintance, liked him. After that he was always at our house, and almost without knowing it we seemed to grow to each other. It was not that we fell in love—that seems to signify something too sudden and violent; it was just that our two lives grew together, until insensibly they became one. And at last it hardly seemed necessary to tell me he loved me; there was no occasion for promises and vows between us such as most lovers bind themselves with. I knew he loved me long before he spoke, just as he knew, before any saying of 'yes' or 'no,' that when he asked me I should be his wife. Do we not turn naturally to our own home when the time comes to go to it? and so I turned to him, the home that knew and welcomed me, and had waited till I was ready. I had no thought of his not loving me, no fear, no dread of his not understanding this or that, no more than he had of my failing him. We knew that all the world might pass, and all the stars sweep by, but we should just stand together, without doubt or fear or question of each other. Was it a very tame love-making? I do not think so. It was the calm, still beauty of a summer that does not wane. We did not need storms and clouds and cold gusts, and sudden sunshine, and all that more uncertain lovers need, to test our strength. There is a love that knows no doubt or fear or

change, that is far deeper and more passionate than that which is always protesting and making signs to show it has not vanished. The sea is not deepest where the restless waves ebb and flow and toss their snowy crests upon the shingly beach; but far out, where it flows still and smooth and there are no stones and rocks to spend its strength upon. It seemed so strange that we had ever been apart, there was no fear of anything coming between us when we were once together. How strange it seems that even Death had power to take one and leave the other. Yet even death is not so strong as love, and it has left us that, though one sleeps on not knowing, and the other sits here and waits. I think sometimes that death must be a sadder thing to those who love less. Ah! but I am speaking in spite of my own heart. But it is so; for had we loved each other less, had there been doubts, and fears, and hopes, and misgivings, as there are between those two who went laughing down the stairs just now, I could not have borne the agony of the end, the vanishing of all possibilities, the thinking it all over—of wondering how this had been, and what that had meant, the sense that never again could one thing be set right and another explained, or protestations tell how much or how little we had felt. The love that wanes, and squabbles, and changes with the wind, and grows cold when time and space have come between, or

that hangs on a word, and is for ever questioning itself and its fellow, is it worth having; is it worth calling love at all? Ah, poor heart that has to depend on it, you have perhaps the little joys of earth, but you miss the calm of heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FORTNIGHT has passed since Mrs. Greenside's relations arrived, and since Ralph and May first came to see me. The latter have been many times since, but never to stay long. Molly has been ill, though she is better again now; I have been ill too, and but for the anxiety about Molly I should have broken down altogether. It seemed as if some terrible thing was overtaking me; a dread I could not express was dogging me; but I kept my lips shut, and, when Dr. George came, tried to look bright and to talk, and he did not even suspect what the effort cost me. After all, it was only the re-action, and now that Molly is looking well again I am getting better too. Only this craving for happiness is on me still, the sick disappointment at not getting strong. I hate my own selfish impatience, and think again and again of the many worse lots there are in the world, but it does not reconcile me to the possibilities in my own. Age perhaps gets used to sorrow and pain and makes them its sad companions, but till one is

old how is one to help longing for health and brightness? And yet with youth and age alike I suspect it is the same. We may keep our lips shut, and hear our silence called resignation and many fine names; but wear what garments we will, our poor human hearts beat the same beneath them all.

I am glad that we are here in this little inn and among these pleasant people. It is impossible to help liking them, or to help being interested in their lives and those things that are much to them. Now that Molly is better again I am content. They have all been kind to us and paid us visits. Even Ralph, who confessed that he did not care for children, likes Molly, and plays with her and caresses her; and he is never tired of going over old times with me. I have tried to make him talk about May, but he always avoids it, though he assents cordially to all I say in her favour and seems pleased when her name is mentioned.

'We must get you out for a drive,' he said yesterday; 'it would do you and Molly good. I will try to-morrow to find something in the shape of a carriage that won't jolt the life out of us. Would you like to go out with me, Molly?'

'Yes, *very* much,' Molly answered; 'but mother too?'

'Oh yes; mother too,' he laughed. 'I wouldn't take you without her for the world; I might lose

you by the way. Perhaps May will go with us if you will ask her?' he suggested.

'Or if you ask her,' I said, amused at his manner.

'Then it will depend on the young lady's temper. She is as perverse as she can be just now.'

'I dare say it is your fault.'

'Oh, no doubt it is; at the same time, any one more——' But the entrance of Mrs. Greenside put an end to our talk.

We have not seen much of Mrs. Greenside lately. She is always kind and anxious, but now that her brother is here she is a good deal taken up with all that is going on in the house. Miss Josephs comes in very often, and I like her, though I have not learnt to know her very well. She talks more to Molly than to me. The soft sweet voice in which she first spoke is natural to her; she never raises it, and her smile is never less sweet than on that first day when it caught my fancy, but I know little more of her. Yes, she plays well; the beautiful hands seem to have a charm in them when they touch the piano. I could fancy that all her soul goes down to her finger-ends and finds some strange sympathy in the keys. A haunting voice seems in them—a yearning and tenderness, a memory of many things of which the girl who is playing knows nothing. I sometimes look at her and wonder what is behind the pale face, with the soft shy eyes. There is some-

thing very maidenly and gentle about her, so that I think the poor sardine's chance cannot be a very good one; for he is hardly the man to take the fancy of this simple damsel. He would please a merry, laughing, dashing woman of the world better. His good-heartedness and straightforwardness, and all his solid virtues, are things she would know how to value; but this girl would only take them as a matter of course, and expect, besides, a more heroic, more romantic lover than I fear it is possible for the sardine to be. I spoke to her about him once, but she did not seem much interested—only said, with a little smile, 'aunt told me you knew him, Mrs. Keith,' and changed the subject. Her father came to see me one day last week. Mrs. Greenside brought him in, and he at once talked of Mr. Cohen.

'My sister tells me you know Frederic Cohen,' he said. 'He's a very decent fellow, a very good fellow indeed. I don't know how it was we did not see more of him.'

'I am very glad to hear you say so. He was a staunch friend to me when I was in a great deal of trouble,' I answered.

'I can quite believe it,' Mr. Josephs said. 'I have always found him with the right notions about him. He ought to be in Parliament. He is very sound in his views, and I mean to do my best for him.'

'He has very sensible views,' I said.

'He has very sensible views indeed,' Mr. Josephs repeated. 'I remember particularly his remarks about this country, and I have lately proved the truth and value of them for myself.'

'Do you like Spain?' I asked, though I knew what his answer would be.

'Like it!' he exclaimed bitterly, as if all the persecutions of centuries were in his mind. 'It is not possible to like it. I have never felt more strongly about anything in my life than I do about Spain. Its very form of government—— But then, a lady knows nothing about politics. I feel a compassion for the country itself. It has climate and beauty—everything but a people to bless it.'

'And the people?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Have done their best to spoil it. The bare, barren land, face to face with this cloudless sky, is a shame and reproach to the lazy, helpless people that encumber it. The Spaniards have done literally nothing for themselves, and have undone all that has been done for them.'

'But this is a reproach to their rulers rather than to the people,' Mrs. Greenside said. 'Individually they are surely well enough: the people are not responsible for the laws they have to obey.'

He shook his head. 'People make their own laws in these days—indirectly, of course, but still they make them, if they choose. Spain is too far behind the century to have found this out. The people are warped and priest-ridden and callous.'

'One never imagines till one comes here that Spaniards are callous and apathetic, but expects to find them full of fire,' I said.

'So they are when they are roused, fire of a wrong kind; in any good, manly cause they are never conspicuous. And, apart from their public morals, the people are not good individually, Mrs. Keith; they are cruel and lying and passionate. Where we at worst use fists, they use knives.'

'But this is from uncontrolled passions,' Mrs. Greenside said, with the air of a person being coached up for an important conversation in the future.

'Yes, it is from uncontrolled passions,' he answered, 'and from centuries of misrule; a people wholly destitute of sympathies and overweighted with superstitions, with a barren land and an all but bankrupt exchequer.'

'And why are the French and Italians so different?' I asked.

'The French have a love of country and enthusiasms that save them from many things, and the Italians have their simple tastes and love of nature—'

'The Germans have also a great love of country,' Mrs. Greenside began, as if she were trying the effect of a remark.

'What nonsense, Harriet; we don't want to discuss all the nations on earth,' Mr. Josephs said quickly; and then turning to me, he went on, 'I have been much struck in watching the landlady here. She sits in the evening fanning herself and talking to her lover. The other night a sick dog lay down at her feet; she kicked it away——'

'Oh, but perhaps she does not like animals,' Mrs. Greenside said.

'I was going on. A few minutes later a deformed boy, with the disease in his eyes that is the curse, or one of the curses, of Southern Spain, came up and said something. She treated him with open disgust, and, turning to her companion, said it was a pity he was allowed to live; the deformed and the sick ought to die.'

'What did the boy say?' I asked, with a shudder, vowing that her hands should never touch Molly.

'Not a word; that is the curious part of it. To him it was only the expression of natural cruelty—cruelty that was not in her alone, but in him too; he will mete it out to others as it is meted out to him. No doubt he throws stones at foreigners, and especially at women, already.'

'Perhaps she is a disciple of Darwin, and believes in the survival of the fittest,' Mrs. Greenside said earnestly, but with a slightly abashed manner. She is a clever woman, and by the light of recent theories often makes appropriate remarks, but she seems a little afraid of her brother, and does not talk as well as usual before him.

'Then she should despair of herself,' he said, with grim humour. 'She is as little fit to survive, or less, than the boy she insulted. If she marries this Spaniard with whom she spends most of her time, and has children, they may take after her.'

'Mr. Josephs, you are worse than Mr. Cohen about the Spaniards.'

He laughed at the remark. 'Our race does not owe them much,' he said bitterly.

'Ah, but the days of persecution are past.'

'Only because the safety of persecution has passed. I do not believe that the Spaniard is one whit less cruel now than in the days of the Inquisition. His religious fervour has cooled, but not his love of cruelty, as the bull-fight proves. Give him the excuse, and he would enjoy a burning as much as ever.'

He stopped suddenly, as if he thought he had expressed quite enough opinion regarding Spain, and asked after Molly.

'She is better, thank you,' I answered. 'She is out there on the balcony with your daughter.'

'Is she?' and he got up with a pleased expression on his face, and went to the window and saw Helen in the low chair, which had been placed round the corner to shelter it from any possible draught, nursing Molly. 'Why, Nellie, you make quite a picture. So that's your little one, eh, Mrs. Keith?'

'I want to come to you, mummy,' said Molly.

'Oh, Molly,' pleaded Miss Josephs. 'Have I not been kind to you?'

'Yes, you are very kind,' Molly said beseechingly; 'but I do like being with mother so.'

'Of course you do. Father dear, shall I come and read to you, or what would you like to do?' and she gave Molly up to me.

'Well, let me see. I suppose you are ill, Harriet?' he asked, as if Mrs. Greenside's illness was a matter of course.

'You know I am never well,' she said reproachfully, as she went off with her relations.

'Mrs. Keith, if you are writing to Cohen at any time, you can give him my very kind regards,' Mr. Josephs looked back to say.

'He is very vulgar,' I heard Mrs. Greenside remark. 'I wonder you encourage him. I know Helen did not like him.'

'Ah, that was because you put her up to it. I think he is a very decent fellow.'

All this was said as they went downstairs to the patio, and all the hotel as well as myself could hear it.

I wish now I had told Mr. Josephs of the sardine's letter. It was only the chance to speak of it that I wanted, and somehow that did not arise. It came two days ago, and this is what it said:

'DEAR MRS. KEITH,—Your letter was very welcome. You have fallen in with the young lady, and I have no doubt she and her father have had a good time without their amiable relation. I see you are as bad as the rest of your sex, and determined not to let one have any peace. Still, if Miss Josephs is willing, I will do my best to please you. She did not seem willing last time I saw her, but the best of a feminine mind is, that you never know how soon it will change. Let me know when she arrives. I am half in mind to come and see you; might get offered a passage home in the *Flying Dutchman*. No place like a yacht for quarrelling—or the reverse. Don't be surprised if I turn up one morning; in fact, I should but for Mrs. Greenside. That gentle female was too much for me last time, and might be again. I hope the little girl is better. Glad you have cut Malaga. Told you the Spaniards

were a bad lot, and you'll find Josephs will agree with you and me. To return to the other subject: she is a very nice little girl, if Mrs. Greenside hasn't spoilt her.

'I should like to hear from you very much when there is any news.

'Yours ever,

'F. COHEN.'

I wonder what will be the end of it? I do not like to write and raise hopes that may never be realised, and, though the father is evidently prepossessed in the sardine's favour, the daughter has not made a sign of caring for him in any way. On the whole, I come to the conclusion that it will be wiser not to write at all just yet, but to wait and see how things go on. It would not be pleasant if he came here only to be refused.

Mr. Josephs' account of the landlady haunts me; it confirms all that I have felt about her myself. I wish I could hear of a good French or English maid, for if these kind people staying here now go away before we do, and I fall ill, who will wait on Molly? It would be impossible to trust her to these cruel Spaniards.

A week later, when I am again thinking this over, May Vincent and Helen Josephs come in to

ask if they may put Molly to bed? She is a sort of plaything to these happy girls, and they are never tired of doing things for her. When Molly is in bed they both stay to talk, and I think each half wishes the other would go away. At last, May, who has evidently a bit of news that surprises her, can restrain her merry tongue no longer.

'Lord and Lady Bexley are not going to Bordighera after all, Mrs. Keith,' she says. 'They are going to the Pyrenees, and they do not start for a fortnight, so they will be here longer than we expected.'

'Yes?' After all, there is nothing remarkable in that.

'And they have asked Mrs. Greenside and Miss Martin to go with them; and she will go, we think——'

'And leave her brother?' I ask, in surprise. After all her professions of affection, and after they have come so far on purpose to see her, it seems a little odd that she should leave her relations behind in this little place, for they are going to stay over Christmas. Mr. Josephs does not want to get back to England before the Session begins.

'Oh, papa won't mind,' Miss Josephs says; 'he likes aunt to enjoy herself, and she often gets tired of us after a little while.'

It is strange that Lady Bexley should invite Mrs. Greenside, for neither she nor Lord Bexley

appeared to like her at first. It surprises me too that Mrs. Greenside did not mention the arrangement, for she was in here to-day, and she generally tells everybody all that she is going to do; but this is soon explained away by her niece.

'Aunt has been envying Lord and Lady Bexley so much,' the little Jewess goes on, 'and saying how many things her state of health makes her miss;—it has made her miss seeing Granada, for one thing. And then she told Lord Bexley that she wished she were going to the Pyrenees, that it would be so interesting to watch whether they would inspire him sufficiently to write another book; quite suddenly this afternoon Lady Bexley went up to her and asked her if she would care to go with them. I think it took her by surprise, for they have not been very intimate.'

'But if Mrs. Greenside is not able to go even to Granada, surely she cannot get to the Pyrenees?' I say.

'Poor auntie said it would be a great undertaking for her; but she is so fond of intellectual society she evidently cannot resist accepting the invitation——'

Suddenly Molly calls from the inner room, 'I only want just to kiss you, mummy dear;' and she puts her arms around my neck, and says, 'Poor mother, do you remember how you used to cry

about Jack? Poor dear Jack, I have been thinking of him.'

Miss Josephs comes to the bedroom door almost before I have time to answer, and says, 'May has gone down, Mrs. Keith. She is coming to see you after dinner, with Mr. Bicknell, I think. Shall I play to you a little while? I know you like to hear me sometimes,' she adds, as if to apologise for asking.

So she goes to the piano, and plays first one thing and then another, while I sit listening here, holding Molly's hand and hiding my face down in the bed-clothes. It brings the past all back before my eyes. At first all is bright and happy. There are the green trees and the woods, and Arthur coming over the meadow. Presently I hear Jack upon the rocking-horse, going to and fro, hitting the floor with a sounding blow as he comes forward, almost stopping with a little uncertain swerve as he goes backward—there he goes, to and fro, to the sound of the girl's playing. Suddenly she begins an old minuet. She played it a few days since, and told me its history—how it was found in manuscript among a pile of music in an old country-house in Germany, and brought to England by the finder a hundred years ago. It set me thinking then, it sets me dreaming now, and I shudder as I think of all the dead people who have danced to its stately movement. How strange it is

that I can see quite plainly, here with my eyes shut, so much that has never been save in my imagination. There is a long room with a polished floor, and the windows have little diamond-shaped panes of glass. By the fireplace, in which the fire has burnt dead and low, an old woman is sitting, crouching over the cinders. At the spinet by the window, with her face looking out, a faded, tired woman is playing and watching, for ever watching for some one who never comes. She is playing the minuet just as the Jewess is. The woman by the fire looks up. 'He'll never come,' she says—'he'll never come again.' Then in at the door and softly over the polished boards the dancers come. There are high heels and diamond buckles to their shoes, there are trains to the ladies dresses, they wear wigs and powder; and soft and slow and stately they begin to dance. The sounds go through me; they are sounds from the dead world coming back to the living. There the dancers go, prim and stately, young and old, fresh and withered, in and out the turns of the strange old dance. There is one in a peach-coloured coat, and a lady who looks up as her train sweeps past him. Her little slipper is down at heel; the diamond is missing from her earring. He stoops over her hand and whispers. So they go on, till the music sounds farther and farther off, fainter and fainter, and with drooping heads and weary feet they

steal away—ah, whither? Into the past again, back to the dead people among whom they have slept so long, the dead to whom we all are going. The sounds coming from the piano are but the sounds that have been awakened for many in years gone by, that may still awake again and again in the years to come. A child may bring them to life, a simple girl has power to send them on into space, and yet there is never one, wise or simple, that can bring back to life the atoms that have moved, and laughed, and wept and loved, and forgot, as they listened to those haunting notes in the past. Oh! what is life, and where is it? Is it here in my heart that is so sore, or in my little child sleeping there; or is it in those sounds that wander on anywhere that time or chance or fancy sends them? It seems, as I sit here and listen, as if life for ever held fast by some strange force is theirs; life that is held but a little while by our own longing that is ours—life that is waiting for some freak or fancy to let it slip away into the eternal silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I ROUSE myself at last, and go back to the sitting-room. It still wants half an hour to dinner-time. There are fresh newspapers on the little table in the patio, and nobody will be reading them just now, so I go downstairs thinking to bring them away, to read comfortably here on the sofa.

The patio is not deserted, as I expected to find it. Mr. Josephs and Mr. Vincent are sitting in the dim light, arguing as usual. They rise as I enter, and put a chair for me; but I shake my head. 'I am going back, and will not disturb you,' I say.

'Delighted to see you, Mrs. Keith,' Mr. Josephs says. 'Mr. Vincent and I often have an argument together about this time, and unless Mr. Bicknell is here, it is generally a pretty close one.'

'And how does Mr. Bicknell make a difference?' I ask.

'Well, you see, Mr. Bicknell has not much opinion of people who think differently from himself,' Mr. Josephs says drily.

'Oh, come, that is hardly fair,' Mr. Vincent says. 'Bicknell is a party man, and, like all of them, he is a little warped, perhaps; his views have developed the obstinacy in his nature, as they do in most men. Like many of them, too, he often seems half afraid to look at things from any other point of view than his own, for fear, perhaps, of being tempted to cross over.'

'Then his firmness suggests weakness rather than strength?' Mr. Josephs says.

'No, not at all,' Mr. Vincent says staunchly. 'He is a very good fellow, and I won't have him abused. He is apt to be a little one-sided, perhaps; but it is, after all, your one-sided men who have headed most big movements, and carried most big things in the world. He has his own way of doing things, but it generally turns out to be a very excellent way in the end; I have a great regard for him, and won't listen to anything against him.'

'That's right,' Mr. Josephs answers; 'I like to hear you stand up for him, you are quite right;' and he looks at Mr. Vincent with distinct admiration for the way in which he has defended Ralph. Then he tells me that in the course of the next few days he and his daughter are going off to Granada for a little visit, and that they mean to stay at Antiquera for a night on the way. At Antiquera, in old days, the Jews suffered terrible things, and Mr.

Josephs, who is never slow to talk of his race and the persecutions it has suffered, seems to have a morbid craving to look on those places in which it has suffered most.

'I hear the houses are built very tall round the old square,' he says. 'They were built tall on purpose, with many gaping windows, so that the Spaniards might enjoy the spectacle of their fellow-creatures being burnt for love of Heaven.'

'Ah, but you forget,' Mr. Vincent answers, with a shade of the pleasant insolence that often distinguishes him. 'They were obliged to take some severe measures. After the downfall of the Moors, the Jews got so much of the national wealth into their hands, that if some check had not been put on them they would have been masters of the entire country.'

'Burning was a nice little check, and heresy was merely the excuse, then, you think?'

'Well, well, things must be called by some name, and for that reason often get wrong ones,' Mr. Vincent answers. 'After all, too, Spain had had a very brilliant day under the Moors, and some reaction was bound to come.'

'Spain has had no day, Mr. Vincent; she has had nothing but one long night, broken by one brilliant dream and a few fitful visions.'

'Perhaps you are right,' concedes Mr. Vincent,

benevolently. 'But let us hope she is ridding herself of superstition now.'

The Jew shook his head. 'Centuries have made so many things hereditary, it will take centuries more to root them up. I believe in nothing so firmly as in hereditary power.'

'Well, your race has proved that there is something in it. I suppose belief in it has had more to do with keeping you together than anything else.'

'It has had a great deal to do with it—that and our feeling of responsibility to the future. We know that while we keep to our traditions we are safe—experience has tested them; directly we depart from them there is danger. From our point of view, we are never free of responsibilities; all that we inherit we have to hand down unweakened as an inheritance to those who come after us.'

'How do you mean?' I ask. 'Do you think the good man leaves his virtues, and the bad man his vices, to be carried on; or are you speaking outside those?'

'Certainly, along with all else that he has. We cannot cultivate a single new feeling or desire without knowing that we may be creating a like one for the next generation, or sowing the seed of a new instinct that may work through the whole future race. No individual, unless he lives on a desolate island where example is useless and union with his fellow-creatures

again impossible, is free from obligations to his people, and even then he would owe its traditions respect.'

'Does not this idea weaken your feelings as an individual?' Mr. Vincent inquires.

'No; it strengthens them, for with so great a responsibility the individual gains in importance.'

'Mr. Josephs, are you proud of being a Jew?' I ask.

'Certainly I am.'

'That is like Mr. Cohen,' I answer.

'Ah, he is a good fellow,' he says thoughtfully. 'But for my sister we should have seen a good deal of him. My sister, like many other women, has some very absurd notions; but I mean to keep Nellie under my own eye in future.'

'I am so sorry you are going, Mr. Josephs,' I say. 'I hoped to have known your daughter better; she has been very kind to Molly and me, only we have not been well enough to be of any good to her. She plays beautifully; I have been listening to her for a long time this evening.'

Mr. Josephs looks pleased. 'Thank you, Mrs. Keith,' he says gratefully. 'I like to hear my little girl praised. But we are coming back here in a fortnight, and then I hope you will know her better. The *Flying Dutchman* is being repaired at Malaga; she won't be ready for some time, and we

shall come back here and wait for her. We like this place.'

'But your sister will be gone with the Bexleys.'

'Oh yes, that will be all right. We generally go apart after a meeting,' he adds drily. 'We shall pick her up again, perhaps at Bordeaux, on our way home. She and Miss Martin will be safe enough, wherever they are. There are some advantages, though you have not discovered them, Mrs. Keith' —and he bows and smiles—'in not being young or pretty, and my sister has arrived at that fortunate age at which she may be left to her own devices with impunity.'

'It is fortunate that she is going with the Bexleys, though,' I say; 'it will console her for your going to Granada.'

'Oh yes, it will quite console her,' he answers.

I think, as I carry off the newspapers to my room, that Mr. Josephs is hardly as grateful as he might be for his sister's affection. I am sorry he and Helen are going away, for even if they come back they will not have long to stay, and I have been hoping that chance might help me to say a good word to the latter for the sardine. As yet it has not been possible, for she is so shy and retiring that it is not easy to become intimate with her quickly, and I have felt all along that I did not know her well enough to speak of what has been in

my mind, and now it seems as if the chance had gone.

After dinner Ralph comes in, but not to stay, as I had expected.

'I have brought you a book,' he says, 'but I must be off again directly, for I have promised to have a game of billiards with Vincent and Bexley. May is coming up to see you. How is Molly?'

'She is better, thank you.'

'Have you heard that the Bexleys have asked that awful woman to go to the Pyrenees?'

'Yes.'

'It is quite amazing. Lady Bexley has been almost rude to her till lately, and pointedly turned a deaf ear to all her hints and flattery. Well, suddenly yesterday her manner changed, and to-day she invited her to travel with them. Oh, here is May; I will leave you to her tender mercies. Good-bye, Maggie; good-bye for the present, miss,' he says to May, in the half-mocking, half-protecting manner he often assumes.

'Good-bye,' she says, with a little impatient shake of her head. 'You are better, then?' she asks, as she half follows him to the door.

'Better?' he says loftily.

'Yes; better tempered,' she says, pouting. 'You have been very disagreeable all day.'

'That is because you have deserved it.'

She draws up as if to be haughty or disdainful, and with her head thrown back she says half humbly, half poutingly, but quite softly, so that I can only just catch the words, 'I am sorry.'

He laughs in a pleasant, triumphant fashion. 'That's right,' he says, as he goes out of the door, and looks at her for a moment as a man looks only at a woman he loves and is proud of. When he has gone downstairs, she turns round and stands waiting for me to say something about him. There is an expression on her face again which says quite plainly that she wants to talk of him.

'Had you been quarrelling?' I ask.

'Oh yes,' she says, with a laugh that meets a sigh and is stopped by it.

Then we sit down and are silent for a while. It is a great thing to know any one so well that you can sit together without speaking, and can think and rest as well as in solitude, yet feel all the time the comfort of companionship. There is no test of sympathy greater than this. Presently I turn to her and take up the thread that has been dropped.

'My dear,' I say, 'you two are very fond of each other.'

She starts as if she had forgotten my presence, and answers almost in a whisper. 'I don't know. Do you think he really cares for me? You have

seen us so often together now, do you think he really cares—do you?' she asks eagerly.

'I am sure he does,' I answer, 'if looks mean anything; but surely you are engaged?'

'I hardly know. We were, and we squabbled; it was broken off, and it has been partly made up, and—oh, I don't know how it is! we are always squabbling and making it up; and sometimes I think he loves me with all his heart, and at others it seems as if he not only doesn't care, but is deliberately trying to show me that he does not.'

'And then?'

'And then? Oh, we have been weeks and even months without meeting—or caring perhaps, I don't know; but we always get back to each other. We can't help it,' she says, almost to herself, and in so low a voice that I can hardly hear her;—'it is life.'

'I wonder how it will all end?' I say.

'I don't know, and am afraid to think. I just accept to-day, and am happy in it;' she answers, trying to laugh. I look down at her face, thinking how odd it is that she and I should both be living in the present, neither daring to look forward—I, with my dread and weariness, feeling sometimes as if I stood just at the end of the world, waiting for a gate to open to let me pass out; and she, standing in the sunshine, with the whole world before her, if she can but open the gate and pass in.

'Mercifully, the world is round,' I say, 'so that we see but a little way ahead.'

'Oh, but it will all come right; I know that, really,' she says gently, and looks up with eyes full of faith in the future.

'But how does he come to be travelling with you, and what does your father say to it all?'

'He has often travelled with us. My father likes him very much, and thinks it is wisest to let us manage our own affairs, and not to interfere until he is asked.'

'Have you known him very long?'

'What, Ralph? Oh yes; ever since I was sixteen, with gaps in between.'

'Why does your father like him?' I ask, thinking of Mr. Vincent's words to-night.

She looks at me in surprise. 'There is so much to like in him,' she answers. 'I don't think it is possible to like any one in the world so much as it is possible to like Ralph, and yet—you will think this a strange thing to say—and yet I know that in some things he is selfish and uncertain; he is often unkind, and he is not sympathetic. Oh, but I ought not to say this to you, Mrs. Keith; only I seem to know you so well. I knew your face in some dim way directly I saw it.'

'Do you love him?' I ask, getting up and putting my arm round her shoulder.

'I don't know, honestly,' she answers. 'I shall never care for any one else as I have cared for him, and do still at times. There are days when I should think it the happiest lot in the world to be his, and there are others when I simply could not and would not risk life with him—days when it seems as if I do not care for him at all. Do you know,' she goes on suddenly, 'sometimes I think that I shall one day unexpectedly marry some one else, just in pique, or in a sort of self-defence, to save myself from a man who is certain at times to be unkind to me. Then I shall settle down to a life that will kill all that really lives in me, and Mr. Ralph may go and reflect that he can do better, or that "he who will not when he may," etc., etc., whichever he pleases.'

'I wonder if you do really care for him?' I say, speaking more to myself than to her.

'I don't know,' she answers, putting her face down and resting it in her hands; 'but I know this —that if he died I should break my heart. I can live without seeing him, without marrying him, I can exist even if he is angry with me; but if he died I should break my heart and die too.' She stops for a moment. 'Ah, Mrs. Keith,' she cries passionately, 'why did you wring all this from me? I have never spoken about it to any one else on earth; and you will never speak of it again, will you, never to any one?'

'No, I never will,' I answer, with all my heart; but in spite of Mr. Vincent's testimony to him downstairs, I wonder what it is she sees in him to care for so much; for it seems to me that he is playing fast and loose with her, and that he is made of the stuff of which very weak women's heroes are made, the type of man who bullies women and thinks it manly, who mistakes a merely physical power in himself, as the woman he beguiles mistakes it, for power of a far higher and greater sort.

'Tell me what you like so much in him,' I say gently. 'You say he is selfish and unkind sometimes. Why do you like him?'

She lifts her face from her hands, and answers, with a light in her eyes and a proud smile on her sweet face—

'He is so manly and so truthful, and though he is often selfish in little things, yet in many great ones he is grandly unselfish, and I would trust his word, if he once gave it, before all the world's; and he never depends on any one but himself, and if he once tries to do a thing he always does it. I don't know what it is altogether, but I have always felt that I wanted something more in a man to like than most women get and are content with, and that only he of all the men I have seen has got it.'

'My dear child,' I say; 'and yet you do not know if you love him?'

'Yes, I do,' she whispers. 'I love him more than my life; and I think—and I know,' she gasps, 'that he loves me, only he will not let even himself know it often, and sometimes it seems as if he deliberately throws my heart back at me;' and she bursts into tears, and puts her arms round my neck.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. JOSEPHS and his daughter started yesterday for Granada. This place seems quiet and empty without them, and May (whom I have hardly seen since the night, a week ago now, when she told me of her love for Ralph) will miss Helen's companionship, for latterly they were a good deal together.

To-day Mrs. Greenside keeps her room; she has letters to write, and feels saying good-bye to her brother and niece so much that she is not equal to leaving it. Miss Martin reports this when she comes to inquire after Molly. She too looks dull; perhaps she misses Helen. But she says, 'No; people never make much difference.' Molly, who has not forgotten her walk with Miss Martin, creeps up to her. 'Show mother the little knife,' she whispers; but I see Miss Martin press her hand as a sign to be silent. 'Then, sing me a song,' she says. 'Mother won't mind; will you, mother? One day Miss Martin sang me a little song while you were gone down for some books Do sing it now to dear mother, Miss Martin.'

'Yes, do,' I say.

Miss Martin looks almost unhappy. 'I can't sing, and I never learnt to play properly. I only know a few notes my mother taught me, and the songs I learnt to please the children,' she says.

'But take me on your knee again, and play and sing it just as you did when mother was not here,' persists Molly, who will not be denied.

'Do, while I paint in that beggar,' I say, turning to my easel by the window.

Miss Martin goes to the piano. She is so nervous that she lets the lid fall back, and is visibly uneasy at the noise it makes. She sits down, and the first chord she plays shows that she is no musician, and yet she has a tremulous, nervous touch that atones for her want of skill. In a sweet but utterly untrained voice she begins to sing one of the 'Songs of Innocence,'—'Piping down the valleys wild.'

I look up in a moment. 'Who taught you that song?' something makes me ask, rudely enough, perhaps.

'My mother,' she answers. 'She learnt a great many songs from a gentleman to whom she was engaged before she married my father;' and then she adds awkwardly, 'He was the brother of one of her pupils, and she was engaged to him.'

'But they didn't marry?'

'No; the family didn't like it, and so he went to India. My brother is with him there. He wrote after my father had failed—he was in business as a commission agent—and asked my mother if anything could be done.' The colour comes to her face as she adds, 'My father got into trouble, and—and it made him take to drink.'

It is a dreary little history, and I long to say something kind to her. But, though she does not understand what it has all meant, Molly speaks for me.

'Poor dear Miss Martin!' she says, and kisses her. 'Sing me another song, please.' This time Miss Martin has more courage, and sings less nervously; when the song is finished she gets up, closes the piano, says, in her usual dull voice—

'Mrs. Greenside will require me, I think, Mrs. Keith;' and leaves the room with the quiet, methodical air that is natural to her.

I am still painting when José, the old serving-man, brings in a note. 'The señorina gave it to him this morning very early, before she went off into the country with the two worshipful señors, her father and friend, and she told him to bring it in as soon as I was up, but unhappily his memory failed, and he forgot; but all is well, for now it is here;' having delivered himself of this communication with

much gravity, he departs. I open the little three-corner note, wondering what it can be. It is from May.

'DEAREST MRS. KEITH,—'I am going for a long day's riding with papa and Ralph, but I will come and see you directly I come back. I want you to know that I am very, very happy; and Ralph is too, I think. A kiss to Molly.

'MAY.'

The tears force themselves into my eyes from simple thankfulness. I am so glad to read her words. Master Ralph is all right, then, after all. I laugh out for joy, thinking how happy they are, how saucy May will be, and wondering how much love-making his lordship permits himself to do. I should like to make a little face at him, and cannot paint any more, I am so pleased; so I get up and kiss Molly a dozen times over, and call her a pretty dickie-bird, and restlessly wonder what to do next.

'Would you like to go out, dickie-bird? Shall we have an ugly, lumbering carriage and go for a drive?'

'Yes,' she cries joyfully, infected with my good spirits. We quickly put on our things, and look so nice in our white shady hats that we laugh again as

we see our two selves in the glass; then we go hand-in-hand downstairs, and drive towards the vega.

'I like it so,' Molly says, as she looks out at the palms and olives, and up at the blue sky; 'I like it so, dear mother.'

'And so do I, my darling,' I say; and my heart is full of rest, for May is happy, and the day is bright, and I turn from the sunshine that is sparkling on the sea to look at Molly's face. She looks so well that once more the tears force themselves into my eyes—tears of thankfulness and not of sorrow; and all the past is forgotten, and all the future trusted, for the sake of the blessedness that is in my heart to-day.

We are tired when we come back, but we have been so happy this morning that we do not mind. As we enter the Fonda de Madrid, the patio looks shady and green, the divans are soft and low, the wicker chairs are cozy, and the little table is there with newly-arrived papers; so we stay, instead of going back to our own rooms, and Molly has a long rest on the cushions.

In the afternoon, after luncheon, the Bexleys and Mrs. Vincent keep us company.

'It is always dull without May,' the latter says; 'but it did me good to see her go this morning, she looked so happy.'

'Perhaps she felt happy,' I say.

'Yes; I hope she did,' Mrs. Vincent answers, with a long-drawn sigh. 'I often wonder,' she goes on, looking at the Bexleys, whom she knows much more intimately than she does me—'I often wonder how May will take sorrow. It is sure to come to her one day, I suppose.'

She pushes her hair back, and waits anxiously to hear what they will say. She has a soft, kind face, and her hair is grey, though she is not old; nay, she is hardly middle-aged. She looks French, though she has the timid, confidential little manner very characteristic of a certain type of English-woman.

'She will take it bravely,' Lord Bexley says warmly, 'for she will be brave about everything; but I think she will feel little sorrows less and great ones more than most women.'

'It will be a terrible thing if she marries a man she does not love.'

'She never will,' Lord Bexley answers; and, judging from the present state of things, she will not have the chance.'

'Mr. Vincent and I have often talked it over,' Mrs. Vincent goes on. 'I would rather see her married to a man she cared for, even if he had faults, than to the most perfect being for whom she had not an overwhelming love.'

'It doesn't matter what a man is, provided, of

course, he is up to a certain mark, if a woman is only head and ears in love with him. Her imagination supplies him with any number of virtues and accomplishments,' Lord Bexley replies.

'Nothing but a great love—I mean a great love satisfied—will prevent May's life from becoming almost tragic,' Mrs. Vincent says softly, in her most confidential voice; and then she whispers to Lady Bexley, 'It is a great pity.'

Lady Bexley perhaps thinks it is a wrong time for getting deeper into the subject, for she changes it by turning to me and asking if I have heard that Mrs. Greenside is going to Pau with them.

'Yes; I was surprised,' I answer.

'I am sure you were. We did not take kindly to poor Mrs. Greenside at first, I fear. Her great recommendation to us all was that we supposed her to be a very intimate friend of yours and dear little Molly's.'

Molly looks up and smiles at the description of herself, and puts out her hand to show that she is pleased at it; then she leans back again, and, with her great eyes wide open, listens as before to all that goes on.

'No, that was a mistake; for I only met her on board ship,' I explain.

'Oh yes; so we found out afterwards,' Lady Bexley laughs. 'By the way, Mrs. Keith, was the

portrait of the niece ever painted? We heard a great deal about it.'

'No; I think Mrs. Greenside forgot it, or perhaps there was not time. There was so much riding and driving to do.'

'Ah:' Lady Bexley laughs. 'The fact is, Mrs. Keith, I fear we have supplanted you. She is very inconstant, and likes new people.'

Mrs. Vincent looks round, and says in her lowest, most confidential voice, 'She likes to fasten herself on to people. She is a very vulgar person.'

'Come, come; I won't let you abuse her,' Lord Bexley says. 'She is the only person who ever praised my book. My wife treated it with silent indifference.'

'No, dear, I didn't,' his wife says earnestly; 'only I thought you might have done it so much better.'

'It is very odd,' I cannot help saying, 'that Mrs. Greenside should go and leave the relations whom she was so anxious about to their own devices, for I believe they are coming back here.'

'She has been a great deal of trouble to them,' Mrs. Vincent says, as if she knew it for a fact.

'Don't you think we are very kind to take her and Miss Martin in charge all the way to Pau?' Lord Bexley asks.

'Very,' I answer.

'She is not going to stay with us,' Lady Bexley explains. 'We only said, when she expressed a desire to go there, that it would be very nice if we could all go together; but of course, when we are there, we shall go our separate ways. She will want to go somewhere else after a time, and so shall we.'

'I am very sorry for her,' I say. 'She is quite alone in the world; she has no husband or children, and I don't think her brother cares much for her: he merely looks after her as a matter of duty.'

'I shall be glad when she is gone,' Mrs. Vincent says. 'She is not a person I like.'

'Pity us, then,' Lady Bexley says. 'Her loneliness and misery are all a part of herself,' she adds, turning to me. 'She would be miserable without a little misery. You know what I mean.'

Somehow the conversation makes me indignant.

'I cannot understand,' I say, 'why you have invited her to go with you. It does not seem quite fair to make much of a person you do not like. She may not be very charming, but she is a person to be sorry for, and she is very good-hearted.' And then I tell them how kind she was to us when we first came, and had no one else to speak to; how she took us out driving, and invited us to cozy afternoon teas, here where tea is a luxury and comfort almost unknown; and how she made much of Molly; and

insisted on giving me a soft shawl she valued greatly when one day she saw that I was chilly.

Perhaps she is vulgar and patronising, but she is also kind and generous, and I fear that I have hardly been just to her in my thoughts, so I speak out warmly, thinking the while that, if we could look into poor Mrs. Greenside's heart, we should doubtless find it aching enough, for, save wealth, she has little to make it otherwise. Lady Bexley is not at all offended.

'I think you are right,' she says frankly, 'and I feel quite reproved; but I do not wonder at any one being kind to you and little Molly.' And then she gives me a great surprise, for she asks suddenly, 'Do you know Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Keith?'

'Yes, indeed; but do you know him?'

'We have known him for a long time. My husband has a great regard for him.'

'Yes, that I have,' Lord Bexley puts in. 'He is a great friend of mine. We heard from him some days ago. He said that he knew that we were here from you.'

'Yes; I told him the names of all the English here.'

'You liked Miss Josephs, did you not?' Lady Bexley asks, with the air of a woman who has a secret that pleases her, and I begin to wonder how much she knows of the sardine's affairs. 'I will tell you some-

thing,' she whispers: 'it was Mr. Cohen who suggested that perhaps Mrs. Greenside would like to go to Pau with us; she would have a larger field there, he said. Now do you understand? We want to do a friend a good turn, and we are not such impostors as we seem, for I really think that Mrs. Greenside will like Pau, and I have found out that she and her brother never agree long together.'

Suddenly a carriage stops before the hotel door: we can see all that goes on outside from the patio where we are sitting. Two people alight from the carriage and enter, and look round. Then one of the old serving-men attached to the Fonda de Madrid comes indolently forward, and the new arrivals, who prove themselves to be English, ask if they can have rooms. It is quite an event for us.

'Yes, certainly, if they wish it, the señor and señora can have rooms,' the old man answers, without any excitement, and goes to the landlady.

She is dozing in the little room beyond, hoping to be awake and lively for the evening and Don Carlos, perhaps. She does not trouble herself to come forward, though strangers are few and far between. The old man returns with a key, and asks the arrivals if they will follow him. We silently watch them disappearing up the staircase, wondering if they are surprised at the dust and dirt that distinguish its marble way, or whether by staying at many Spanish

inns they have learnt to think such features natural to the climate. They are young people and good-looking we think they must be newly married. They come down again after a few minutes, dismiss the driver of the fly, and pay the lazy beggars outside for having carried in their luggage; for here, as at Malaga, there are no people attached to the hotel to do these little services.

'Quite an excitement,' we all say to each other.

'It makes dinner something to look forward to, though of course they will be at the other end,' Lady Bexley says.

'Where do all the people who appear at luncheon come from?' I ask, for the table is always full of dull-looking Spaniards.

'Some of them are staying in the house,' Lady Bexley answers, 'and some just come in to their food. I suppose they are the main props of the inn. I never understand where the women feed, or if there are any women, and if so, whether they ever get anything to eat.'

'What becomes of the Spaniards who are staying in the hotel, for we never see them except at table?'

'They have a separate sitting-room. They are men engaged in commerce, I think, or having duties of some sort in the place. It is much larger than you think, Mrs. Keith, and I fancy that the men we

see at table have business dealings in Zahra. When they have nothing to do they idle away their time at the *café* opposite, for some people must support that *café* and the ceaseless piano.'

The new arrivals find their way to the landlady's room, and we hear them ask if there are any letters for Mr. or Mrs. Walters.

It is getting late, and Molly is tired. Lord Bexley offers to carry her up, and when he has done so he stays for a few minutes looking at Molly's portrait and the little bits of Zahra which I have been painting lately.

'I wish you would let me carry two or three of them away,' he says, 'and consider that they were commissions—that is, if they are not bespoken, and if you do not want them.'

'I did them to give away,' I answer, for in my mind I had planned to give them to Mrs. Marshall and the sardine; 'but if you want them, I could easily paint some more for myself.'

'I should like them very much. What a delightful balcony you have, Mrs. Keith,' he says, and steps out. He looks towards the sea at one end and the street at the other, at the church across the way, and at the beggars about its entrance. 'It is a comfort that the Spaniards make picturesque beggars, since there are so many of them,' he remarks.

Suddenly, on her way downstairs, seeing my door

open, Mrs. Greenside enters, and in a moment the whole place seems full of her. She takes in the situation at once, and, in her most earnest manner, asks—

'Has Lord Bexley been looking at your paintings, Mrs. Keith? He is a born artist.'

'And a born writer too—don't forget that, please, Mrs. Greenside,' he says. 'By the way, I have been asking Mrs. Keith if she had finished your niece's portrait, but she says it is not even begun.'

'Oh, she has not been well enough,' Mrs. Greenside answers, as if she thought him rather cruel for even thinking of it. 'I could not ask her to do it. Besides, I shall see so much of her when we are all back in London.'

'I am sure you will,' he says: and then he tells her the great piece of news. 'Some people have just arrived—a charming young couple, still on their honeymoon by the look of them. Don't you think it is rather a pity we are going away before we can cultivate them?'

'But there will be so many charming people at Pau, it really doesn't matter,' she says thoughtfully. 'Now, tell me, Mrs. Keith, how is your child? I hope Miss Martin has been to inquire after her every morning? I told her to do so.'

'Yes, she has, thank you,' I answer, wondering if she thinks there is some healing power in the in-

quiries, for she speaks as if they had been made for no other reason; and then I remember poor Mrs. Greenside's own troubles, and add, 'I fear you miss your brother and niece very much?'

'Oh yes,' she answers, with a long sigh; 'but I felt that it was better to send them away; it was far better for them than staying with me any longer.'

'It was very kind of you,' Lord Bexley says solemnly; 'but you should think of yourself, Mrs. Greenside.'

'Oh no,' she says, with another sigh, as she takes him downstairs, 'I cannot; I never think of myself, dear Lord Bexley.'

And then, while Molly lies still and watches me, I go on with the painting of the Spanish beggars, thinking the while of Mr. Josephs and his hereditary theory. I do not like it in so far as it makes one feel like a puppet dancing to the strings in dead men's hands. For if we who are here to-day shape the natures and determine the emotions and characteristics of those who come after us, surely by that same reasoning we ourselves are but creatures of the past, and our best deeds as well as our worst are but the workings of those whose bodies have fallen away from their stronger wills. And yet I like to imagine that if Molly grows up and bears children, all her sweetness may be handed down to future generations. It is a strange thing to think that

those we loved best were, after all, as far as our eyes and ears could take in, but the least part of themselves; that they were but the tangible manifestations of a greater power than physical life could express or retain in one individual; that they were an echo, a spark, a fragment belonging to a power that finds a shelter here and a voice there in one form or another—a power that, for want of some other word to describe it, we call divine. And yet, ah, poor humanity, with all its foolish longings, with all its individual feelings, where is the comfort for you in that? Let me go over to my child, and put my face against hers, for in human love there is rest for me and the like of me.

Half an hour later the light is not good enough for work, and I sit singing in a very low voice to Molly. Suddenly there is a sound. It brings a smile to my lips, for it is the trampling of horses' feet, and it means that May and Ralph and Mr. Vincent have come back from their long ride. A few minutes later, and there is May's light, swift step on the stairs. It sets my heart beating with pleasure to see her. Her riding-skirt is gathered up in her left hand, a flush of happiness and excitement is on her face.

'Dear Mrs. Keith,' she says, kneeling down in front of me and putting her arms round my neck, 'are you better? and how is dear little Molly?'

She goes over and kisses Molly, then comes back to me. 'I have had such a happy day,' she says, with a long-drawn sigh of contentment. 'We rode a long way out into the country, and found a little green wood, where we lunched beneath some cork trees. Oh, it was lovely!'

'Yes, dear?'

'I wanted to tell you something last night,' she goes on, in her sweet, low voice. 'I came to your door and listened, but heard no sound, so I thought you had gone to bed, and was afraid to disturb you, and this morning you were not up when we started. I gave José a note for you. Did you get it, dear?' then she raises her head and shows me her happy, shy eyes, and laughs a little and turns them away again, as if she were half ashamed and half afraid to tell the rest.

'Well?' I ask, smoothing her hair.

'It is all right between us,' she says softly. 'He says he never thinks of life without me, and last night he asked me if I really thought I could put up with him for all my days.'

'What did you say?' and I laugh for joy, just because it does me good to see how happy she is.

'I told him yes, I could;' she lifts up her head and says it proudly. 'And he asked me if I really cared about him, and I told him yes, I did, more than for the whole wide world; and I do.'

'And what did he say to that nice little confession?'

'He said he couldn't understand it, but he looked very happy; and then we walked up and down outside and round by the sugar-canes, and all the time we could hear the waltz that is always being played at the *café* opposite. I shall remember that piano as long as I live, I think.'

'So shall I—that and the church bell opposite; and so you and Ralph are really going to be happy together?'

'I hope so; I do hope so. I will never vex him again if I can help it. It has been all my fault that we ever had any squabbles at all. Oh, Mrs. Keith,' she says, with another long-drawn sigh, 'I am so very happy; it makes me half afraid.' I stoop and kiss her, and wonder if he cares enough.

I sit all the evening thinking of them in a vague, dreamy way, for the day has tired me too much for active thought. I wish that she and Dr. George had chanced to love each other, for in his wise and gentle hands she would be safe. It is not Ralph's heart I doubt, but only his gentleness. With Dr. George—— and, as if my thought had had some power to bring him, he enters.

It is long after dark, the waltz is being played at the *café* opposite, and May, perhaps, is strolling

with her lover again beneath the soft Spanish sky. There is comfort in the sound of Dr. George's step; with him there comes a dim sense of rest and safety.

'I was not quite easy about Molly this morning,' he says, 'so I thought I would come and see her.'

But having seen her, he is evidently more satisfied, and stays talking with me for a little while, looking at me with the sad, wondering expression in his kind eyes that sometimes half frightens me, for it seems as if they knew some secret about us of which they would not yet allow his lips to speak. 'I wish you were not so entirely alone,' he says; 'if you had only some one——'

'I have the child; she is all I want.'

He looks at me again, long and gravely. 'Why do you always wear a shawl?' he asks.

'It is comfortable; it wraps me round. I like it.'

He goes up to Molly's portrait; and then, as if one innocent thing set him thinking of another, he says, 'I made a great discovery to-day. At the end of the garden, just beyond the orange trees and myrtles, there are some primroses; the first ones opened their eyes this morning.'

'I must come and see them.'

'I will have a root put into a pot and brought

to you. Have you seen the violets? There are lots of them.'

'No. It is like the coming of spring; it makes one happy to hear about them,' I say.

He looks up and the answer is in his eyes. Dr. George always seems to find his happiness in the simplest, purest things of life; and for children and sick people he has sympathy and understanding. Oh, why didn't May fall in love with him? Life would not be the game of chance that it may be now, if she and he cared for each other.

'I wish you would come more often to the garden,' he says. 'I am in Malaga all day long, so should not disturb you. Philip would wait on you, and Molly could pick flowers and oranges while you painted.'

'We will go to-morrow. Perhaps it will amuse Philip to sit to me, if he has time.'

'Time!' he laughs. 'Time is the one thing that every Spaniard has, for he never does anything with it.'

'But he wastes so much,' I answer; and then he laughs and bids me good-night.

'Be sure to go to the garden,' he says, holding my hand for a moment. 'I shall like to think of you there, and of Molly seeking for violets.'

I listen to his footsteps as he goes. He has to

turn the corner, and pass beneath my window to get to his own house. He looks up and sees me on the balcony.

'Good-night,' he says, and passes on.

Mr. and Mrs. Walters, the people who arrived to-day, come by a moment later. They are very close together; they look like lovers. I hear him say, 'We will go there next year, my darling.' They are arranging for their future. It makes me shudder. I go back into the room, and get down a book from the little shelf in the corner, and suddenly stagger and fall against the sofa. . . . 'We will go there next year, my darling.' They are making plans for the future, those happy people who passed. . . . Next year!—I shall stand on the balcony and watch for the New Year. . . . I shall feel it coming over the sea and down from the sky, wrapping the hushed world in a new, strange mantle of hopes and fears; and the old sorrows and the old joys, where will they be? Will they slip down into the earth? ah, no; the New Year will wrap them all in. . . . Oh, this misery, how it twines round and round and stifles me. . . . no, I will not watch the New Year come. I will hold Molly close and tight, and it shall find us so. . . . this pain is going a little farther and farther away. . . . is it seeking some other poor soul? Perhaps May is hearing her lover say he loves

her; if he is only true—it will be bitterest pain of all for you, my dear, if he is false; and yet I cannot bear just this silently. . . . Oh, but I will . . . . it will not matter if you get well, little Molly; if you get well, my sweet. . . .

CHAPTER XX.

CHRISTMAS is over. The blossom is coming out here and there on the orange trees still heavy with fruit, the violets and primroses are thick, there are wild flowers everywhere, and at night the nightingales are singing loud. Mrs. Greenside has been gone three weeks, and we have seen and heard nothing of Mr. Josephs and his daughter. Now the Vincents talk of going. Mr. Vincent is tired of Zahra, he has heard of an old friend at Gibraltar, and wants to go there for a bit before returning to England. With the Vincents, of course, Ralph would go, and then, with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Walters, we should be the only English people left in the hotel.

Mr. and Mrs. Walters are nice young people, and have been married two years. He is an American, and paints pictures, but not very successfully as yet; he tells us quite frankly that he lives on his wife's relations. She is English, devoted to her husband, and all the time he is working sits by his side, stitching at delicate muslin garments for the little

child they have left at home. The quietness at Zahra seems to astonish them.

'How you have all lived here on a piano at a *café*, and a noisy omnibus in the street, with no other excitement, all the winter, I can't understand,' says he.

'The climate is lovely, and the place is very picturesque,' I answer. 'You ought to be content, with so much material ready to hand.'

'The professional side of me is exceedingly well satisfied,' he answers, 'but the other side hankers after a little more dissipation. Now, if the gitanas were more plentiful——'

'Joe!' his wife exclaims.

'If gitanas were more plentiful, the place would be more interesting, from the purely picturesque point of view, of course; however, we must make the best of it. My wife's aunt managed this little trip for us. We wanted to see Spain, so we persuaded her that it was the great unpainted country of the world; and all we have to do is to take home so much canvas, with colour well arranged on it, and we shall be sent somewhere else next six months. Canvas with colour on it you'll find just about describes what I do.'

'What nonsense, Joe. Your pictures are lovely; every one says so,' his wife declares.

'Well, my dear, I have your word for it, but you

are the only means through which people express themselves; still, I would not doubt you for the world. By the way, Mrs. Keith, have you done any business since you started? Come across any big buyers?'

'I never thought of it. Lord Bexley bought some sketches of me.'

'Well, it's a pity I wasn't in the way then. Mr. Vincent tells me you had some rich Jews here lately, so I've missed them too, it appears.'

'Two of them talked of coming back. We expected them a fortnight ago.'

'I hope they will come, for their own sakes. It isn't often that the chance of getting a good thing occurs, and they will miss a great deal if they stay away.'

This talk is in the patio. We are all waiting to start for the doctor's. He has invited us to afternoon tea, and is coming back from Malaga on purpose. It is quite a dissipation for us, used as we are now to the quiet of this little inn.

'No doubt a great lover of sunshine could be content here for any length of time,' Mr. Vincent sighs, as we turn the corner of the street on our way. 'There is nothing but the sunshine—I found Christmas a great relief. Ah, you ought to have been at Malaga with us, Mrs. Keith; such a fuss and hurry as there was the day we went over. The bare-legged

boys, minding the noisy turkeys packed on donkeys' backs; the piles of fruit and the black-eyed women, tambourines and beggars—such a jumble and confusion as there was with a bright sky overhead, it was a sight worth seeing. I am glad we went. You ought to have been with us.'

'Mrs. Vincent did ask me to go, but I was so tired,' I answer, anxious to forget all about the dreary festival and the long hours at the window.

Ralph always begins to protest when Mr. Vincent finds fault with Zahra.

'A blue sky and a shining sun, a lovely open sea and a vega thick and bright with colour, a place with a past and possibly a future, and a hundred things to think about,' he says. 'What more do you want?' He opens the doctor's garden gate as he speaks, and looks round at the orange trees golden with fruit, at the great bananas, at the pepper trees, on which the pink bloom is fading, and the ferdinandias, white with large trumpet-flowers. The whole scene appears to satisfy him. 'I could live here for ever,' he says, as we walk up to the house.

'No doubt you could; no doubt,' Mr. Vincent says. 'But I dare say you would be meddling in Spanish politics and plotting with Castelar before six months were over your head, so the world would not gain much by your seclusion.'

Philip, the rough old serving-man, comes to meet us with the air of a grandee in his castle. 'The señor was seen returning to Zahra, and just now was sent for; but it is only to one who is sick close at hand; he will not be many minutes gone. Perhaps meanwhile we will enter and consider that the house with all that it contains is our own; and, if we will allow him, he will have the honour of showing us what there is to see.' So we are taken through several bare, comfortless-looking rooms, and one that is made cozy, with books and curiosities; we are shown some bad copies of Murillo and a model of one of Charles V.'s clocks—the clocks that it was the plague of his life to keep in order; and at last we rest in the patio, a grander one far than that at the Fonda de Madrid, with a fountain in the middle and seats covered with Eastern rugs. Over our heads are the orange trees again, but there are great palms at the back, and beyond are the small-leaved myrtles that the Moors loved and planted in all their Spanish kingdoms—the same myrtles of which Charles V. made his labyrinth at Seville. Molly listens to the splashing fountain—three slim dolphins, a fat cupid, and a broken-nosed, legendary beast in each corner—and looks up at the thick trees and the sunshine coming through them.

'Oh, it is so nice,' she says.

'She is quite right. She has healthy instincts,

as yet unspoilt. I could live for ever in a place like this, away from cities and towns, if I had nothing to do,' Ralph exclaims.

'May likes the country,' I say; but he does not answer for a minute. Sometimes I think that already there are little clouds between them again, though they were laughing and talking this morning. It is only that they never seem to believe in a future together, to be wholly sure that they will risk it. After all, marriage will be the wisest thing for them, and I hear that it is to take place as soon as they get back. 'Unless we both change our minds,' Ralph told me one day. 'I am not sure that May will care to settle down into the kind of life that I like, or that I am cut out for domestic joys. I am so used to absolute freedom, and my strongest instincts will always be out-of-doors.' But it will all come right, I think with a sigh, as Philip enters and presents us with flowers; and May, putting a bright bunch in her waistband, and thanking Philip with smiles and broken Spanish, sits down by Molly, and begins a whispered conversation that absorbs them both. Mr. Vincent and the American have been walking about the garden, so I ask Ralph about his politics, but he laughs and shirks questions.

'Don't talk about them,' he laughs. 'Whatever they are, they are better than Mr. Vincent's. He has simply none.'

'I didn't suspect you of Radicalism,' I say, 'because you are so absolute about women—how shall I express it?—you seem to think that they ought not to do as they like.'

'Precisely,' he says; 'I think they should do as they are told. My Radicalism, if I have any, does not take kindly to self-willed young women who want to go their own way.' Whereupon May laughs, and says he is born to be a tyrant, but I ask him to tell me about Mr. Vincent's politics. 'He simply hasn't any,' he repeats. 'He is the only man I ever met with who lives absolutely outside them. He never reads a newspaper, except for news, or an article for fear of being influenced. It is one reason why I like being with him; it is a great rest. He is willing to talk of books and painting and history, or anything you please except the forbidden subject. I don't believe he would remember the name of the prime minister himself if he were not a great man apart from his politics, and if he had not an old man's old-fashioned reverence for people in high places.'

'Ralph is talking treason about you, papa,' May says, as her father enters with Dr. George and Mr. Walters. The doctor apologises for his absence, shakes hands all round, kisses Molly, and hopes Philip has taken care of us; then tea is brought in dainty china cups—pale Indian tea, that makes

us all feel still more as if we were sitting inside an Eastern story.

'Let us make "tertulia" and be cozy,' our host says; so we gather round in what we hope is Spanish fashion, and talk and laugh, while Philip brings iced water and feathery azucarillos and snow-white méringues, and hands them round with a majestic pride of place that makes it impossible to refuse them.

'Well, Mrs. Keith, and what treason was Ralph talking to you?' Mr. Vincent asks.

'It was only political, not domestic treason, so perhaps you won't mind,' I say.

'Ah, you mustn't listen to him. He is one of your gentlemanlike Radicals who are going to put us all right, and die of brain fever. It will be their own doing, and no one else to blame—no one else at all.'

'But why should they die of brain fever, Mr. Vincent?' Dr. George asks.

'Over-work, over-excitement, over-pressure, over-hurry in politics as in everything else—that is the general tendency among all the clever people, and their brains won't stand it long; they'll die off, mark my words, they'll die off, and leave the world to the idlers who knew better than to throw themselves away.'

'But I think,' Dr. George says, as if he were merely vaguely repeating a rumour he had heard,

and did not think himself at all in the position of one who might offer an opinion—'I think there have been some clever men who have escaped brain fever; even Castelar, with whom our friend here is to plot, hasn't yet died of it.'

'Well, well, I dare say not,' Mr. Vincent says, as if he really didn't know whether Castelar were alive or dead; 'but still, at the same time, I believe that all this over-work is a great mistake—for the next few generations, at any rate. When people have been accustomed to better education, they may bear greater intellectual pressure; just at present it is a most dangerous thing. The Jews are the only people as yet who can bear it safely; they have always been a better-educated people than ourselves, and the result is that they can do more head-work and live longer than others——'

'This comes of talk with Mr. Josephs,' May says saucily; but he takes no notice of her.

'Gradually,' he goes on, 'as education becomes more general, and a few generations have accustomed the majority to it, mental strain will come easier.'

'Meanwhile I believe you are a Radical at heart, Mr. Vincent,' I say, just to tease him.

'No, no,' he exclaims emphatically; 'Conservative, Liberal, Radical, I wouldn't be one of them for the world. Once have a political creed and you are lost. No, I am a free man, and have no politics of

any kind. I have generally found the laws of the country answer exceedingly well when they were properly applied, and as long as my tenants are content, and landlords are not shot in England, and there is no threat of taking my land from me, I am content, and shall leave politics alone.'

'May I ask you, sir,' Mr. Walters says, 'what you do with any votes you may have? To which side do you give them?'

'That entirely depends. I read carefully what they all have to say; it is the only time I trouble myself about what they do say. But I don't wish to shirk my duties, though I avoid creating new ones, so I go and hear them, and vote for that man whom I take to be the best fellow all round; for, no matter to what party he belongs, I feel he'll be the greatest credit to his country, so that in voting for him I'm doing my duty as an Englishman, and whether I'm doing it as a politician never troubles me.'

'It is quite a pity that Mrs. Greenside is not here to make an appropriate remark about the survival of the fittest, and to compliment you on carrying out your Darwinism in politics,' Ralph says.

'May I ask you, sir,' puts in Mr. Walters, with a slight American twang, which I think he occasionally does on purpose, 'in what way you think politicians are over-working themselves? It never strikes us,

when we read your debates, that they are in any particular hurry.'

'Well, perhaps not. But see, for one thing, how they stump the country and talk—one side as much as the other.'

'And how would you alter that?'

'I have not thought it over; but there are many ways in which it might be done. The talking might all take place in particular centres, or, better still, in London, and the voters be brought up in special trains.'

Mr. Vincent always breaks down when he comes to a practical point.

'Well, that would be a bad state of things for London,' Mr. Walters says. 'And now, Miss Vincent,' he asks, turning to May, 'may I ask what you are in politics?'

'I? Oh, I have none. What am I, Ralph?'

'A goose, I should say,' he whispers, so that only May and I can hear him.

'I shall be curious to see what you are in ten years, Miss May,' her father says, 'and whether the craze for whirl will bite you too.'

'Oh, can you doubt it?' she cries. 'Would I go in a slow train when I can get a wild express, or a jogging cart when there is a swift hansom? Besides, if we don't make haste and work to get the world as good and as beautiful as it can be made, we shall all

die, or the world come to an end before we have done any living in it at its best at all.'

'She talks as if she were going to live for centuries,' Mrs. Vincent says.

'So I am; at least, not I, but the like of me, dear mother; it is all the same, and it is more exciting to work for others than for one's actual self, don't you think so?' she says, turning to me.

'Yes,' I answer; 'besides, the past and future always seem as if they must be a part of our own lives, only we can but remember a bit that comes between and is our present selves.'

'Since when did you take to thinking, May?' Mr. Vincent asks.

'Dear father,' she answers saucily, 'I only felt and spoke. I never think; I never shall, for fear of dying from over-pressure.'

Ralph looks at her and laughs. 'Couldn't we all go and wander about in the garden, doctor?' he asks.

The talk comes to an end. Ralph and May disappear down a quaint cypress avenue, but the sky at the end of it shows that the sun is sinking, and Molly must go home. I pull myself up from the low, soft seat, and think of the journey home, a hundred yards off only, with something like dismay.

'Let me come with you,' Dr. George says. 'I

will carry Molly;' and Molly, putting her arms up to his neck, settles this for me.

So we go back to the Fonda de Madrid. Mr. and Mrs. Walters have turned towards the sea, to stroll till it is dinner-time, and only the Vincents return with us.

'We have had a nice afternoon, doctor. You have a charming place,' Mr. Vincent says, evidently thinking that the occasion calls for some remark; 'no doubt you will thoroughly enjoy it as the spring comes on, and everything bursts into full bloom.'

'I fear I shall hardly be here,' Dr. George answers. 'My brother is coming back much sooner than he expected, and he wants me to return to England.'

My selfish heart stands still, for I dread to think of Dr. Murray, with his cold, formal manner.

'And you will go?' I say mechanically.

'Yes, I suppose so; I believe I ought.'

'I don't want you to go,' Molly whispers; 'I want you to stay.'

'I want to stay, my pet,' he whispers back, and kisses her.

I look at her proudly. My sweet! with the wonderful eyes and the strange message in them,—will you never be able to tell it? and my heart, will it ever be able to hear it?

'When will your brother come?' I ask.

But before he can reply we are at the hotel, and

there, in the doorway, watching for us, is a tall figure. I know it well enough, only I can hardly believe my senses.

'Mr. Cohen!' I exclaim.

'Yes,' nods the sardine, as calmly as if he had seen me the day before yesterday at latest. 'Thought I'd just come and look you up. How are you getting on?' He offers to take Molly from the doctor, but Molly looks at him doubtfully. 'Not forgotten me already, have you?' he says to her. 'Thought you were hardly old enough for that kind of thing yet.'

Molly looks at him again, and gradually remembers. She kisses Dr. George, and goes to the sardine.

'I don't mind coming to you,' she says slowly; he carries her into the patio, and we are alone for a few minutes.

'Well, how is Molly getting on?' the sardine asks; and I tell him that she is not worse, that this has at any rate held a spell of hope, that the sunshine has been a blessed thing, that people have been good and kind to us, that perhaps by the time we return she will be stronger, and that that is all there is to tell about her; then he looks at me. 'You don't look up to much—to less than ever, in fact,' he says. 'Mind, you mustn't chump up, or Molly will have to go away all alone next winter. But, I

say, you didn't expect to see me, did you now? Thought I wouldn't write, but just give you a little cheerful surprise.'

'That's right,' I laugh. It is so nice to hear him talk again; it makes everything feel like home. 'It is a very cheerful surprise, Mr. Cohen.'

'And what did you think of Mrs. Greenside? She seems to have been in great force. Bexley told me all about her, so I dropped him a line, and told him if he would undertake to get her comfortably out of the way for me this time, I'd do the same for him some day; so that little plan was all arranged.'

'Then they took her on purpose?'

'Of course they did. Told him just how it was, and was starting off here when Bexley sent me a telegram that Josephs had gone to Granada, so I turned up there quite by accident, been with them ever since, and brought them back here just now.'

'And how have you been getting on?'

'Pretty well. Nellie's so much taken up with her father that she doesn't seem to contemplate matrimony, as far as I can make out. However, I'm not in a hurry as to time, and if she doesn't see it, it can't be helped.'

'I don't believe you have made the most of your chances. Granada must have been a charming place to make love in.'

'Yes; but, you see, she's romantic and that sort of thing, in fact was rather more taken up with the romance than with me;—wanted to walk about the Alhambra and talk of the heroes, or to be silent and look up at the sky, to walk about the garden of the Adarves by moonlight—deep feeling, too deep for words, sighs, and all that. I felt rather out of it; just as I was beginning to get into it we came away.'

'That was provoking.'

'Very provoking. But women are provoking; rather like them for it myself. Here she comes, so we'll finish our talk another time.'

Then the others come up to us, and somehow it falls to me to introduce Mr. Walters to Mr. Josephs. With a twinkle in his dark eyes, the Yankee says, in the tone of one who has achieved the desire of his life—

'I am proud to make your acquaintance, sir. I have heard a great deal about you, and feel that it is an honour to meet you.'

'Thank you,' Mr. Joseph says; and his face also says. 'Why?' So, with the twang in his voice, Mr. Walters adds—

'Our country knows the names of most Englishmen who have distinguished themselves, and one great reason we go over to England is just that we may see them.'

'Well, well, well,' Mr. Vincent says, aside to me, 'it will be a curious thing to watch them—a Jew and a Yankee. It is pull devil, pull baker. By the way, I never knew what that saying meant, did you.'

CHAPTER XXI.

I HAVE not seen the sardine since the day he arrived, more than a week ago. May Vincent and Nellie Josephs have been in and out for a few minutes at a time, and would have stayed longer but that I wanted to be alone, and—— Oh! but I must speak of what is in my heart.

Molly has been ill—is ill now. Perhaps she caught cold that afternoon at the doctor's, perhaps it is the inevitable end that has only been disguised, and not stopped in its coming. I do not know, but she is ill. She has been terribly ill, and the days and nights have been spent in watching her. Perhaps because of the sweet hope that came, because of the light that was in her eyes and the calm on her face, it has taken me by surprise: for I feel as if I cannot face it, as if I dare not see it.

A great terror seizes me when I think that she will die. I cannot look at her face without my heart growing sick, and my limbs trembling for dread of what is written there. Molly, who is all the

world to me; whose life I have hoped for so, whose life the sunshine has seemed to promise me. I have been lulled and stupefied with hope till this sudden awakening came. It is not that I want to keep her from mere selfishness, just because she is all that I have left,—because I love her so, my own little child, and want her in my sight. It is not that only, for I would lay my own life down gladly and thankfully this very minute if it would be giving life to her. I could get up and walk out of that door yonder, down the cold steps, out into the night, and wander on never to return, if I might know that it would buy health for her.

To think of Molly dying! A little child, you say. Ah yes, just that little child lying there with the quick breathing and the fever burning on her cheeks—to think of her dying, it is like feeling the wide world and all the sunlight in it swept away, leaving me behind in chaos and darkness. Oh, forgive me; forgive this wild outburst. I have been calm enough through the days and nights, sitting and watching; but at last a moment comes in which I must speak, in which I cannot bear it longer, and must wring the madness from my soul with passionate words and tears, or I must die. Molly, my child, my sweetest and best that lives, my all-that-has-been, speak to me. I cannot bear it; I shall die. But it is not *that* I dread, for

I would die and think it sweet, and in death should forget that even you had gone, my own. But it is your life in the world I want—your dear voice, making all who hear it blessed—your eyes, out of which some strange infinite is looking; your life, my sweet, your life to make the world happier and to bless it.—Ah no, selfish woman that I am; I long for it because I love you so. I call it fine names, and find a thousand reasons for your living; but oh, my dear, my dear, it is because I love you so, Molly —Molly, and far worse than death would be life in a world in which you were not.

'Is she better?' I ask Dr. George—'is she better?'

He answers, 'Yes, a little.'

'Will she get well?' But he does not speak. 'Will she die? Oh, Dr. George, will she die?' And then, before he can answer, I stop my ears. 'Don't tell me,' I say—'don't tell me; I cannot face it. I must not know it, if she cannot live. Don't tell me till the last hour comes, or I can't go on. Oh, Dr. George, she is going to die, and I know it.'

'But, Mrs. Keith,' he says, in dismay, 'why have you broken down so? You have been so calm all this time that I have almost wondered at you. What does it mean? My dear friend, you are ill and worn out.'

And then I am ashamed. 'Oh, forgive me,' I say—'forgive me, and I will be calm again. I shall be better soon. But tell me, is she better? No; don't tell me if she is going to die, for I cannot bear it yet.'

'Yes, she is better,' he says; 'for the time, at any rate, she is certainly better; let that console you. Get her up, and make a pile of cushions by the open window in the sunshine; let her sit there all day long and drink in the air. Have courage, dear Mrs. Keith. Remember, all the heroism in the world is summed up in the one word "courage."'

'Yes, doctor; I will have courage.'

'Tell me how you are yourself,' he asks. 'Why are you so weak, and what is it that is making you ill?'

'Don't talk of it; it only worries and distresses me. Make Molly well, and I shall be well; but if she dies, then—then I shall die too.'

'You wouldn't——' and he stops. How little men know women!

'I wouldn't cut my throat? No; I am not that kind of coward, Dr. George, and shall leave my dying-time to Death's own arranging. I shall go back to see my home again. There is a picture there—it is on an easel—and I want to see it again. Not go home? Ah, but you never saw Jack, doctor; there is a little bit of grass that I must crouch down

by and put my face against once more before I can die. I shall go home; but oh, the going—the going.' And then the bitter tears come—the tears that soothe and calm me; I ask him to forgive me, and am ashamed of my own anguish.

She is better; slowly, with many rests between, she is dressed at last, and carried to the next room, and put down on the cushions by the open window. So an hour passes, and when she sleeps I am worn out, my head falls back, a little sleep overtakes me too, and the sunshine strengthens us both.

Miss Josephs comes in when we awake, and then, for the first time since she returned to Zahra, I begin to get back to the outer world again, and ask if she had been glad to see Mr. Cohen at Granada.

'Yes,' she answers; 'it was company for papa.'

It is not a very satisfactory way of putting it, but I cannot remember anything to say, and am silent. Then she tells me that May and her step-mother have driven over to Malaga, and that Mr. Walters and Mr. Cohen are both anxious to pay me a visit as soon as Molly is better, if I would care to see them. I do not understand why the former wants to see me; but I suppose it is merely kindness, and I send word that I will see them in the afternoon, if Molly is not worse. Perhaps it will be

better to meet people. Anything is better than brooding over the fear that almost takes away my senses. I try to rouse myself a little, and ask Nellie about the Alhambra.

'It was very lovely,' she answers. 'Perhaps, only it does seem so unkind to say it, Mr. Cohen spoilt it for me just a little bit. He is very practical, you know, dear Mrs. Keith.' She laughs a little at the remembrance.

'Yes, but he is very good, dear.'

'Oh, I know,' she says, as if goodness were quite a secondary consideration. 'I think he liked pottering about in the curiosity shop at the foot of the hill far better than the Alhambra. He liked driving bargains.'

A rumbling fly goes by towards the sea; two lazy Spaniards lean back in it, smoking. They have the air of fastness that so easily sits on two men in an open carriage. One of them turns and throws a cigarette to the beggar against the church wall. It falls to the ground, and the beggar is too lazy to pick it up, or his dignity will not permit him to do so; while we are still wondering what he will do, the sardine passes and sees us. He lifts his hat, and says something which we cannot hear. I beckon to him to come up. It seems unkind not to let him do so; but before he comes, I ask Nellie

to take him away after a minute or two. He is soon in the room.

'Well,' he says, 'is Molly better again? Poor little thing, are you better?' But Molly only stares at him, and says nothing. 'So this is your crib, Mrs. Keith. You have made it pretty and cozy. Nice little portrait of Molly. You ought to get Mrs. Keith to paint you,' he says to Nellie.

'She was going to paint me for aunt, but somehow it was not done.'

'I see. Unlucky that; kind of bad luck that would overtake Mrs. Greenside, poor dear.' There is something in his voice when he says the last words that, ill and worn out as I am, makes me laugh a little.

Nellie looks puzzled. 'I did not know you liked aunt so much, Mr. Cohen,' she says.

'You see, I have a large heart; takes in a good lot of people—quite a family party, in fact. What were you two talking about before I came up? I went by twice over the way before you saw me.'

'We were talking about the Alhambra.'

'Tell me what it is like,' I say. 'I have often longed to see it.'

'It is very wonderful. It is far more beautiful than anything else I ever saw,' she says. 'It seems like the expression of a people who thought a great deal and were very silent. I never imagined there

could be so beautiful an expression of silence. I used to think sometimes—it looked so dreamy—that, though they had vanished from the daylight, yet perhaps the Moors came back in the night, and walked about in their palace, leaving their dreams behind.'

'Sounds like Little Bo-peep,' remarks the sardine.

The colour comes to her face; she bites her lip and looks ashamed.

'I forgot you were here, Mr. Cohen. I won't be romantic any more.'

'Take him away, dear. He is too atrocious. Come and see me to-morrow,' I say to the sardine. 'To-day Molly and I must be quiet.' For, struggle against it as I will, the sight of people and the sound of voices are not to be borne yet.

This morning May comes in quite early, to tell me of a maid she heard of yesterday at Malaga. She is English, and was left behind by some English people after a quarrel. It did not strike the Vincents at the time how useful she might be to me, but they have since thought that perhaps I might like to have her. I catch at the idea, for I get so tired; but with some one to wait on me I could do all that Molly wants. There is no one to be had here; I could not trust any Spanish woman that I

have seen. I think of Manuela, the landlady, with a shudder; and there is no woman-servant in the house. The rough little woman who used to come in the morning went away some time ago to get a place in Madrid, together with her husband.

'Why don't you drive over to Malaga?' Dr. George says, when he hears of it. 'Molly is better to-day; she is really better—for the time,' he adds again, as he did yesterday, for he sees me watching him, and he does not wish to tell more than I would know; and yet I know all. 'It would do you a world of good—you want a change; and I know Mrs. Vincent, or her daughter, or Mrs. Walters, or any of them, would take charge of Molly.'

I consider for a few minutes, and something makes me long to go, to get away from every one and everything, even from Molly, just for one or two hours—to be alone and to think apart from all surroundings that affect me.

So it is arranged that I am to go to-morrow morning. The doctor offers to take me, but he starts too soon; besides, I want to be alone.

It seems so strange, when May comes in the morning, to look at her face, and to think of the hope in her heart and of the cold dread in mine. She is to stay with Molly while I go to Malaga. It seems as if some strange power were driving me out

of Zahra. I am eager to go, even though it means leaving Molly for a few hours. But she will be safe with May; they are always happy together. I hear them talking as I get ready.

'Dear little sweetheart,' May says, 'how many things we will talk about while mother is away. We have always so much to say and so little time together.'

'Why don't you come oftener?' Molly asks.

'I have so many things to do. You see, you have just mother to love; but I have my father and mother who are here, and my brothers and sisters, and—and many others.'

'Who are the others?' asks Molly.

'I cannot remember them all now, but I love you, dear, and your mother, then there is Ralph ——'

'Do you love him?'

'Yes, darling; I love him. See how many I have to love.'

'And I have mother and you: and I love Dr. George, I think——'

'And Ralph?'

'Yes; but only a little bit, because I do not know him very well, and—— Then there's Jack. Of course, I love Jack next to mother. I never saw dear father,' she adds gently; 'but I think of him sometimes, and I love him too, only I love him when

I am all by myself and do not want any one to know.'

'Those are the people we love best, dear, the people we love when we are all alone and whom we do not want to talk about.'

Molly gives a long sigh. 'Did you have many dolls when you were a little girl?' she asks, after a minute or two.

'Oh yes, a great many. There was one just like that one over there in the armchair; perhaps they are related. Yes, and I know a great many dolls now, dear Molly; they are all at home.'

And so I leave them to their talk, and wait in the patio, while José goes to tell Don Carlos to send one of his tumble-down flies to take me to Malaga.

Mr. Vincent sees me, and asks for Molly. 'I am very sorry she has been so ill,' he says—'very sorry for you, my dear lady; but the spring will make her all right, you'll see—the spring will make her all right. Has May told you that we are going away in about a week's time?'

'No; I hoped you were going to stay longer.'

'It's a great pity, but it can't be helped,' he answers, as if he had nothing to do with it. 'We ought to be moving on, and we must go. Well, here's your carriage, thoroughly Spanish it is, as Josephs would say—thoroughly Spanish. Are you sure that you are wise to go alone?'

'Oh, quite; indeed, I long to be alone,' I say, hardly knowing what I am about.

'I dare say. There is nothing like being alone when you want to pull yourself together. You are quite right, quite right.' And so, with Mr. Vincent's approval, I drive away.

It is a long, lonely road; but for the blue sky and the sunshine, it would be dreary enough. There is little vegetation as soon as we have left Zahra; scarcely a dwelling or any sign of life to be seen on the way; only a sprawling figure or a crouching beggar reminds one that there is any population at all in the land. Here and there a tuft of green and a little mass of bright flowers show how grateful the soil would be for any sort of cultivation. The road itself is full of ruts and cavities and heaps of rubbish; it seems a mere accident, as we go jolting and lumbering on, that we are not at any moment thrown out. But all this I see only in the half-dazed fashion of one whose brain is busy with other things. Here in the bright light and the fresh air, with the glimpse of the sea beyond, I sit and reproach myself for the anguish of yesterday. To have broken down so, to have let go the tight rein and given way! I will not again; despair is only for empty space and silent graves. For life, and life that waits upon one's love, it is weakness and cowardice. I must bear my griefs as others do. After all, it is only the common

lot. Other women have loved and lost, other mothers have seen their dear ones die. Oh, the shallowness of the consolation. What does it help, in the keenest moments of life, to know that bitterest sorrow and briefest joy are the lot of most of us? It does not soften one single pang to the individual to know that the whole race suffers. The sorrow that may come to each separate one of us—the sorrow we must all bear alone and in silence, it makes one, looking back, stand aghast, wondering if the thing is true. Since Arthur went down to the sea that day, since Jack died, since Molly has been ill, I have looked so sadly at people, feeling for them a tenderness, a yearning, and compassion I cannot describe, remembering how much anguish it is possible to bear and yet to live. It is like a terrible secret only known to the like of me, and that only experience can tell. Two of the saddest things in the world, I think as I go slowly on towards Malaga, are the griefs that come unawares on some of us, seeming to sweep away our very lives, or to leave behind but a dull, half-scared remembrance of them; and the happiness that is within the reach of others, and yet they will not grasp it, and yet they let it slip, or some silly anger or pride or cowardice comes between, and one day they sit sorrowing all their lives for that which came and waited and then passed by, because they had not strength to hold it fast, and mere longing would not avail.

The hotel at Malaga looks just as it did the day we arrived. The same beggars are round the door, the same boy peeps in and asks for cuartos. I enter, and see the same little room and dusty passages; the same advertisement of a ship sailing to various ports seems to be on the walls. The man with the red moustache and mock gold watch-chain comes forward. He remembers me, and asks if I will go up to the *salon*; but I refuse, and sit down on a seat in the entrance-hall, beside some luggage which is about to be taken away. I ask for the maid, and am told that a lady engaged her this morning, that she is already on her way to Madrid. So this journey has been useless. I rest for a few minutes, and then rise to go back to the fly.

Suddenly the name on the luggage before me catches my eye. I know it well. It fascinates me,—a wild suggestion rises up within my heart. I stand hesitating and afraid.

'Can I do anything for you, madam?' the interpreter asks. But I do not answer; only stand staring at the name on the luggage.

The master of the hotel sees me, and comes forward. 'Señora, are you waiting?' he asks. 'Is there anything I may have the honour of doing for you?'

'The gentleman to whom that luggage belongs, is he here?' I ask.

'He is there, señora—now coming down the stairs. In half an hour he starts for England.'

I look up and see a tall, thoughtful-looking man. By his side there is a woman—his wife, I suppose. They are coming down the stairs together. I go up to them and speak. He hesitates, but I entreat; at last they turn back, and I follow them slowly up the stairs I know so well.

. . . . . .

An hour later and still I sit upstairs in the *salon*, thinking. The fly is waiting. The people in the Alameda walk up and down and sit beneath the trees. How strange it seems. They live in another world from the world I am in. Just now I crossed the bridge that divides them from me.

Dr. George has professional rooms in Malaga. He may not be there, but if I could see him it would help me.

It is like a dream, the coming downstairs, the getting into the fly, and the little drive through the Malaga streets. I watch the people as they pass—the young, who are waiting for what is to come: the old, who are thinking of what is gone. Ah, poor souls, have you all tasted sorrow? Do any of you know happiness? and the great lull in my heart, is it in any of yours too?

Yes, Dr. George is in his consulting-room. He has just come in, and is sitting by a table, writing.

'Mrs. Keith!' he exclaims. So odd the sound of my own name is, like a sound heard in one's dreaming. 'Is there anything I can do for you? Is it anything about the maid?' he asks.

'No, it is nothing about the maid. She is gone; it does not matter. Dr. George, the other night I was worn out and broken down. It was like a storm, and shook me; but I am better. Will you tell me—for I can bear it now—is Molly going to die?'

He starts at the suddenness of the question. He looks at me, as if he wondered at my manner and at my voice, which is low and steady, but which betrays the great change that has swept over me.

'Don't ask me,' he says; 'it is better not to know;—I cannot bear to tell you.' Every word seems wrung from him; he gets up and looks at me almost in dismay.

'Yes, please tell me. I must know, and I can hear it calmly now. Is Molly going to die?'

'She is very, very ill. She may get a little better, but——'

'But tell me. I *must* know,' I say gently. 'Is she going to die?'

'I cannot tell you,' he whispers, almost to himself.

'Yes, Dr. George, you must tell me,' I say entreatingly; 'I can bear it. Is she going to die?'

He gets up and puts his hands over his eyes for

a moment. 'Oh, I cannot tell you,' he says, 'but it is—it is hopeless.'

I draw a long breath and wait—my own little child. 'And tell me,' I ask, holding my breath, 'will—will she be long?'

He understands. 'It cannot be long,' he answers slowly, 'but how long no human being can say—not yet, I think; but I cannot tell you.'

We stand silently together. There is a long silence, and then I speak again.

'I want you to do one thing for me, Dr. George.'

'I will do anything—anything in the world.'

'Don't tell any one; don't let any one know,' I plead. 'Let me bear it alone. I cannot if they all know; I could not bear them to look at her, and be sorry, and wonder if I shall live through it. Don't let them know. Promise me you will not tell any one that—that she is going to die.'

'I will do anything you wish, but——'

'It is best,' I answer. 'We all know our own strength and weakness. Let me bear it alone and in silence. Don't speak to me about it again, unless it is necessary, and tell no one. Please do as I ask, doctor; it is the best thing you can do for me. Will you promise?'

'I promise you, if you wish it.'

'That is all. Dear Dr. George, I will never forget your kindness.'

He puts out his hand. Something makes me hold it for a moment—just for one moment to hold on to a good man's strength; it may strengthen me. It drops from my hands, and I turn to go, for Molly will be waiting. My little child—my own little child—I can bear it now;—I can bear it and be silent—for in my heart there is a secret.

Half-dazed I drive back to Zahra, with strange eyes that see all things differently, with ears that hear all things in another tone;—drive back with a strange heart to the people who in a single hour have been put a whole world off, but still I shall see and hear and be with them. How altered it all is. Molly, my dear—my dear, whom I have loved so—I can bear it now.

The fly stops at last, I cross the silent patio, and step by step climb the stairs to the sitting-room. May comes to meet me.

'Molly is asleep,' she says. 'Did you see the maid?'

I look at her for a moment, half-dazed, and then remember.

'No, I did not see the maid,' I say. 'Will you go away, dear?' I ask gently. 'I want to be alone with Molly. You won't mind; I am very tired.'

And then I go into the next room and kneel

beside her, and put my face down into my hands and think it over.

My little child, my dickie-bird. She seems to know that I am here, she opens her eyes and stretches out her arms. I take her in mine and hold her fast while we kiss each other with a long, long kiss—we two, who are alone in the world together. My little child, my little child—but I can bear it.

We will not speak of this again. I have done with passionate tears and wild lamentations. It is coming; but it is not yet, and there are days to live —days in which we shall not be apart. We shall never be apart for a single hour again—never while she lives, never any more. There are kind people here who have been good to us—who do not know, and must not know. There are other lives than ours, and we may live a little bit in theirs before Molly goes—before the world ends, and Molly goes. Oh, my little one, my little one, the great storm is stilled, and I can bear it. I will say no word more about it—no word more, for I can bear it, my little child ;—I can bear it.

CHAPTER XXII.

A LONG night's rest. I open my eyes and look round, wondering if yesterday was true, and if the dream of bygone years that came in my sleep was only a dream. I hold up my hand with the wedding ring on it, and look at it half foolishly, then all things come back to my consciousness.

A bright, happy morning, with the sunshine filling the room; the sound of footsteps and the rumbling of wheels in the street, as if some were astir early, ready to rejoice in the spring. I get up and look at Molly, but the terror has gone, and it is only of to-day that I can take account; of to-morrow I will think no more. The routine begins once more, as if the days of the past week had never been—and Molly and I sit in the sunshine by the window again.

I must send for the sardine. I have had no talk with him worth mentioning since he came, and feel as if I had been unkind and ungrateful; but it is not so. It is only that the people here are living in a different world from mine; I dread the sound of their talk and laughter and merriment, am afraid to

see their faces again. I cannot tell why, for the thought of their being happy does me good. I do not grudge them their joys, and would not dim one single moment of their happiness with any sorrow of mine.

Before the morning is over Mr. Walters pays me a visit. He wants to know if he may come to my window and paint the church door opposite, with the group of beggars gathered there.

'I would not be long about it, for I work pretty quickly, as you will see,' he remarks, 'and I'll do my best not to be in your way; but your window is about the only spot from which one can get a quiet and unmolested view.'

I cannot well refuse, so give him leave; his talk will divert me a little, perhaps. He brings his easel at once, and sets to work.

'Where is Mrs. Walters?' I ask, knowing that she likes to sit beside her husband while he paints.

'She's close at hand, you may be sure; but we did not like to ask for room for two.'

'Ask her to come,' I say; nothing loth, he goes, and she returns with him and sits sewing as usual.

May Vincent brings in some flowers and arranges them; I fancy there is a cloud upon her face, but it must be only fancy. Ralph meets her by the door as she goes out, but he does not try to detain her;

with a passing word, he comes in to ask after Molly. He seems amused at finding Mr. Walters installed here, and stands watching him work for a few minutes. It is a great relief that they are here at the same time, for, try as I will, it is impossible to enter into their doings as I did a week ago.

'It is a difficult thing,' Mr. Walters says, as he looks across at his unconscious models, 'to paint a leg or an arm with a bone in it. I think I must try painting in the bone without the flesh on it, as one does the figure without the clothes sometimes, in order to get the anatomy right, and then I can add on the flesh afterwards.'

'It sounds as if it would be a good way.'

'The worst of it is, that people make so much fuss nowadays about the flesh, even when it has a bone inside it.'

Ralph is silent for a few minutes; and Mrs. Walters looks up and says, as if she is stating an almost impossible fact—

'Joe is never satisfied with his own pictures.'

'No one ever is satisfied with his own work, unless he is a conceited idiot,' Ralph laughs. I shut my eyes for a moment while he laughs, but I shall bear it soon.

'That is one use of a wife. She takes the satisfaction into her own hands, and ladles it out in a way that keeps up your courage when times are bad,

and just prevents you from throwing up your brushes and trying a barrel-organ,' Mr. Walters says.

'How is the negotiation with Mr. Cohen getting on?' Ralph asks.

'Well, it can't be called exciting as yet. That picture he wants is one that I like myself, and I should be sorry to treat it with any want of respect; so, as I have made up my mind that it's worth thirty pounds, it would be hardly fair to it, as a picture, to take twenty.'

'You should have remembered that he was a Jew, and asked forty.'

'I might have done that, but while we have several aunts in flourishing circumstances at home, it is a pity to weaken one's natural truthfulness. I think I mentioned before that we have found relations as a means of support answer exceedingly well, and it would not be fair to them to squander away one's work for prices that did not fairly represent it.'

'Still, you know, a Jew will bargain if he can.'

'He will. I must say there are more Jews in this hotel than I have seen for some time—that is, taking them as a percentage on the number of visitors. They are a very interesting people, and I am glad to have the opportunity of studying them. It is one that perhaps is not so easy to get over in the States as on the continent of Europe.'

'Have you no Jews there?' I ask, anxious not to seem too much wrapped up in my own thoughts.

'Oh yes, we have a great many.—If that gentleman in brown rags opposite would settle himself down to his own satisfaction, I should be obliged.—We have a great many, and the number is every year increasing. Perhaps down in Wall Street they have a good deal to say. It strikes me there might be a proverb about them, for when the Jew pipes the stocks always dance.

'What do you think of them there politically?' Ralph asks. Ralph always seems to be studying other people's views. What his own may be he seldom volunteers to state.

'Politically, it may be said of them as occasionally of us, perhaps—that their brilliancy is shown chiefly in their prosperity.'

'It depends upon what you call brilliancy,' Ralph says.

'Precisely; it does, and from which side you prospect round, and whether you have any relations in the stockbroking line.'

'Yes, that makes a difference.'

'It does; for it is astonishing how, with the key of their strong box, the Jews have contrived to lead most nations by the ear at one time or other. You may burn them, or chop them up, or shut as many doors on them as you please, but they just run over

this continent like so many cats over roofs by night, and you may be pretty certain that if there's a good spot for them to drop down on, they are there ready to drop.'

'How do you account for their comparative scarcity in the States?' Ralph asks. 'Is it because they hang together so much, or because they find your countrymen are a match for them?'

'That beggar's leg is correct, I think.—It may be either, or it may be that a Jew is like a cat, and objects to wetting his feet. America is not far, of course; still, if you notice you will find that he prefers the countries he can get to without crossing too much water. Any amount of dry land he can skip over, and a desert or two he looks on as mere trifles, but to water the Jew does not take kindly.'

'Nonsense,' Ralph says, 'the boats are full of Jews.'

'That's true,' Mr. Walters answers calmly, 'and they look a good deal like cats with their paws in walnut-shells. Still, they are not afraid of seafaring.'

'Mr. Josephs half lives in his yacht,' I remark.

'I dare say. I wish he would offer me and my wife a passage in her; he'd find us most invaluable people for a voyage. We are always good-tempered, willing to amuse as far as we can, and we are born sailors.'

'It is rather an oversight on his part not to secure you,' Ralph laughs.

'It is, I can assure you, and if you get a chance of letting him see this, I should be greatly obliged. —I think that beggar is pretty good;' and Mr. Walters gets up and stands a little way from his work and looks at it.

'Maggie, shall I put Molly on the sofa for you?' Ralph asks; and he puts her softly down and covers her over, and leaves her to sleep. 'Let us go and have a smoke,' he says to Mr. Walters; 'Mrs. Keith looks very tired.'

So Mr. Walters leaves his painting and goes off with Ralph, and Mrs. Walters makes an excuse about seeing if there are letters downstairs, and goes too.

I take a rug from the easy-chair, and a cushion, and carry them to the side of the sofa, and lie down on the floor to be near Molly. The clang, clang of the church bell breaks out, but it does not matter; it seems almost as if the fumes of some narcotic were stealing over me, stupefying my strongest feelings and setting some little ones going. I think of Mr. and Mrs. Walters, and of their baby, wondering if it is pretty; I shut my eyes, and fancy I see the white trumpet-flowers in the doctor's garden; they make me remember Charles V.'s clocks; I wonder how he managed them, and imagine I hear them all striking

and ticking at once. But it is so confusing I cannot listen, and I run away in dismay to the labyrinth at the Alcazar—the labyrinth that was to be a monument to the happy days he had spent there. But it is more confusing still, for all the lines shake and grow misty before my eyes; a soft hand reaches down and touches my face. I open my eyes and look up, and there is Molly—Molly, with the sweetest look in her eyes, and a happy smile on her dear face. I sit up beside her, and we look at each other, better and stronger for the sleep, and thankful to be together. . . . just to sit here and to hold Molly in my arms, to stroke her hair, and to hear her voice, oh, the blessedness of it. I cry out in my heart again, as I did at Marseille, if the world might stand still even here, as we wait, ill and worn, but together, I could for ever be content.

Mr. Walters has not come back to his painting, so in the afternoon I send a message to the sardine, asking him to come and see me, for it seems almost as if I had been neglecting him. He comes at once, as pleased as if to sit with me were some great treat.

'Hardly had you a minute to myself since I came,' he says. 'Can't you say you are not at home if any one comes? One comfort is, I believe they are all out. I stayed in and read the papers, and thought perhaps we should get a chat.

'It is quite nice; it is like St. John's Wood.'

'Yes, isn't it? Remember that picture you were so fond of? wonder what your tenant has done with it. Nice little crib, though; I dare say you'll be glad to get back to it.' I notice that he says nothing about Nellie, and I fear things are not going very well. He can never sit still long, so after a minute or two he begins to walk about the room. 'Rather a nice little set of people here,' he says. 'Sorry Bexley is gone; he was the only man I could ever beat at billiards. However, it can't be helped, and I shall never forget his taking away the beautiful relation.' He stops and looks at the flowers. 'Did that girl—what is she called? Miss Vincent—give you these flowers?'

'Yes.'

'She's a fine girl—walks well, got a good expression, no doubt about that. She'd be rather too much of a girl for me.'

'How do you mean?'

'She'd want too much of a curb on her to keep her in hand at all. I like a girl who has to be coaxed, you know, just as you'd pat a horse's neck; a little girl to take care of and look after—cry when you go away and cling to you, laugh when you come back and cling to you, able to do anything she liked when she tried, up to nothing, and yet quite ready for anything.'

'I am quite sure May Vincent isn't up to anything—anything wrong, that is.'

'Oh no, I dare say not; but she's one of your high-spirited ones who'd want a lot of holding in. I don't want to do that kind of thing.'

'She'll love her husband very dearly, if she marries the right man; she'll just be devoted to him.'

'Yes; and if she married the wrong man, or found out she didn't like the right man after she had got him, she might love some one else very dearly, and just be devoted to him, or break her heart, or go and do something off the beaten track. It never does to marry a woman likely to go off the beaten track in any way—gives one a world of trouble, and does not pay.'

'I don't believe May will be much trouble to her husband. She'll never marry a man she doesn't love, and she will think the man she does marry perfect, as long as she lives.'

'Don't think much of her man.'

'You mean Ralph Bicknell; why not?'

'Should say he is a selfish beggar. Thinks his own views and feelings of such a very superior order he never troubles himself to consider other people's.'

'I think they love each other,' I answer, with a sigh, 'and that is the great point. I don't suppose there are many really perfect marriages.'

'Do you think most people fight a little bit sometimes?' he asks.

'Why, no, of course not;' and I try to laugh. 'What I mean is, that I believe very few people marry between whom there is absolute sympathy, and perfect love and understanding in all things, so that their two lives just become one.'

'Dare say not,' the sardine answers, with half a sigh. 'It's a good thing, too,' he adds. 'The world would get to be too highly strung if people everlastingly went on finding kindred hearts and sympathetic souls, and all that sort of thing, you know. Life would become a mass of hearts and souls, and nerves and intellects, and nobody knows where the rest would go to; there wouldn't be any good, wholesome commonplaceness left.'

'What nonsense.'

'It is not nonsense at all,' he says. 'Mr. What-is-his-name downstairs, and lots of other people, say that over-education and over-study may damage the health and bodies of the rising generation. Don't believe it will myself; believe it will only prevent them from becoming fat and lazy. Still, just as, from that point of view, people may go on until in a few generations ahead they have no physiques to walk about in, so would the universal indulgence in the finest feelings wear away those that have been found best for everyday wear and

tear. One must take a large view of things sometimes,' he says, speaking like an oracle, and getting up and looking as philosophic as he knows how. 'But never mind,' he goes on, 'let's stop this. What do you think of Nellie, eh? I have not had a chance of asking you before.'

'She's a dear little thing.'

'Yes, she is;' and then he adds, in the most cheerful manner, 'I don't believe she cares a bit about me. Don't think it ever enters her head that I am on the war-path.'

'I am afraid it doesn't,' I answer regretfully.

'It soon will. I shall have a shy at her the first time I get the chance,' he says, getting very red.

'A shy at her. What is that?'

'Shall ask her to marry me,' he says calmly.

'She'll refuse you,' I exclaim in dismay.

'Of course she will,' he says, in a lively, triumphant tone, as if that were precisely what he was going to propose to her for. 'But, you see, she evidently hasn't any idea of matrimony with me in her head yet, and something must put it there, so I think that'll be the best way.'

'Some men wouldn't like the idea of being refused, even if they thought it would help them towards being accepted later on,' I say, thinking that the sardine has got his personal vanity well under control.

'Ah, you see, they are the men who prefer their own very superior feelings to the woman they are after.'

'But what will you do when she has said "No"?'

'Hang about till it's time to ask again. Perhaps she will say "Yes" then. I hope she will some day. I am awfully fond of her.' He gets up again and walks about, and looks at Molly's portrait just as he looked at Clarence Grove's picture when he came to St. John's Wood. 'That really is a nice little portrait of the young un,' he says. 'You'll make a lot of money when you get back if you go on like that.'

'Yes,' I say wearily, 'when I get back.'

'That won't be just yet, will it? But, to go back to the other matter, there's nothing like plain sailing, you know, then you know where you are. If you like a woman, I believe in letting her know it, and then she knows where she is. If you alter your mind you can tell her so; but I shan't alter mine. Not that sort of person; know what I'm about, and what I want.'

'Mr. Cohen, I want to ask you about Miss Vincent and Mr. Bicknell. Why don't you like him, and what do you think about them?'

'I have watched them a good deal this last week, and it strikes me that they don't know whether they

want each other, or whether they don't. Never happy apart, and only irritate each other when they are together.'

'There's something in what you say; but I wonder why it is?'

'I think he knows she's fond of him, and rather takes advantage of it. A dangerous kind of game with a girl like that; she might go off and marry another fellow if he tries it on too much. There's no knowing what a woman will put up with if she's really in love. Still, it's risky.'

'She knows he's fond of her.'

'You mean she knows he has been. A woman likes to be told it, freshened up, every day, or else she thinks he's altered or changed his mind, or that she's grown into a fright, or some such nonsense. My sister was once fond of a man something like this beggar. I believe that's why I rather hate him.'

'Well?'

'Well, he shilly-shallied about, and tried to find out if she cared about him; never had generosity enough to tell her, in plain language, that he cared about her; but just said things in roundabout ways.'

'Well?'

'He never had courage to risk plain "Yes" or "No" from her lips; at last, in pique and that kind of thing, she went off and married someone else, then the beggar thought he was badly treated.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

DR. MURRAY has come back. He arrived last night; and this morning Dr. George brings him to see Molly. My heart sinks a little as he enters; and, in spite of an evident desire to show some kind of sympathy, his manner is even colder than on the day we first met him. Still, as I felt then, he produces a confidence in his power that is perhaps an unwilling one, but that never wavers. Probably it is because you feel that he is a man to be carried away by no enthusiasms, to be governed by no emotions; but who stands hard and fast by his principles and the letter of his duty, who takes any amount of trouble to arrive at his conclusions, and makes no statement that he is not prepared to back with all his professional reputation. It is a different kind of skill from his brother's—a skill that has little perception in it, but almost mathematical accuracy. There is no comfort to be had from him; but a single word from him, good or bad, would be heavily weighted with hope or fear, for it would not be uttered without almost absolute certainty behind

it. It is good for me to be under his [illegible] controls me. I should never break down [illegible] him, or dream that compassion had softened any thing he might conceive it to be his duty to tell me. Moreover, there would be no disputing his authority, no chance of escape from his strong will. I have a vague fear of him as of one who may some day conceive it to be his duty to do some fearful thing, against which there will be no appeal; but I face him calmly, and speak of Molly's condition without a quiver in my voice. He looks at her carefully with keen, professional eyes. There is no need to ask what he thinks; it is evident that he agrees entirely with what his brother has told him about her. He looks at me questioningly. I almost shrink from his gaze, but my voice does not betray my fear of him.

'My brother tells me you have fretted a great deal about your child,' he says.

'It has not been possible to help it.'

He is silent for a minute, as if considering what to say. 'There is one thing in which I always think we may imitate the Spaniards with advantage —the dignity with which they accept the inevitable.'

'I know; I shall not fret any more; it is over, and I can bear it.'

'Have you always been delicate?' he asks.

'No. I am only worn out; but I shall be better

[illegible] my thoughts are accustomed to what is [illegible].'

'I expect you are too much in this room. You must get out into the sunshine; at any rate, you can get down to the patio and sit there.' Then I remember to tell him that the piano has been a great comfort; he looks pleased, and hopes I will go on using it. 'You must let me know if there is anything I can do for you,' he adds. 'My brother will probably go to England almost immediately. He is very anxious to stay here, but there is an excellent post waiting for him at home.'

'I shall be so sorry——'

'I think I shall stay at Zahra,' Dr. George interrupts, as if he did not wish his prospects to be discussed.

They insist on seeing us safe in the patio before they go, so Molly is carried downstairs, and in a few minutes we are beneath the orange trees and palms. Every one is out apparently, for we have the place to ourselves. Dr. Murray was right about the change, we are much better down here.

Mr. Walters finds us presently, and shows some disappointment. He wanted to finish his beggars upstairs, but refuses to do so while we are here.

'I'll do something else this morning,' he says; 'it's not likely those gentlemen opposite will inherit large fortunes and disappear from that portico just

yet. I'm glad to find you downstairs, Mrs. Keith; you will have the place to yourself, for all the visitors are scattered about. I saw Mr. Cohen and Miss Josephs on one of the seats on the promenade just now, and by the look of them I should say they would not be back again just yet. Their conversation appeared to be very interesting to themselves, but whether it would be so to other people I did not get near enough to judge.'

Perhaps the sardine is having his 'shy' at the little Jewess, I think; and I fear lest his suit should not prosper. An hour later, when he enters, his expression shows that I have guessed rightly. He tries hard to put a brave face on it, but he cannot hide his soreness.

'I am glad to find you alone,' he says. 'It is the only bit of good luck I have had to-day.'

'Well, is it all over?'

He gives a little nod. 'I got through pretty well, on the whole,' he says. 'She's a nice little thing, good little girl down to the ground—just what I have always thought her. She's much too good for me, and that's the long and the short of it.'

'What did she say?'

'Said she'd no idea of it. That lovely relation of hers, in fact, had told her I liked someone else, so the little girl hadn't even thought of me for herself. Like my impudence to think of her; she's much too

good for me. The tears came into her eyes when she shook her head. She has such pretty eyes. Ever look at them?'

'Cheer up. Perhaps she'll say "Yes" next time, now that you have suggested the thing to her mind.'

But the sardine shakes his head sorrowfully. 'Don't believe I shall ever ask her again. Could feel that I wasn't half good enough for her the moment I began.'

'I think you are quite good enough; quite—quite.'

'Oh no;' and he shakes his head again. 'You have no idea what a nice little girl she is. I wonder what sort of a fellow she'll marry? I hope he'll be the right sort.'

'She'll marry you,' I say.

'Oh no,' he says again, more sorrowfully than ever. 'She won't have anything to say to me. I am just wasting my time.'

'I am so sorry.'

'It is a bore, isn't it? Think I rather mulled things at the Alhambra. I got so mixed up about the Moors, didn't care a bit for them, and she was rather disgusted.'

'I don't suppose it is that.'

'It is a pity, for she wouldn't have a bad time; I would have taken care of that. Such lots of

things we might have done, and had no end of fun.'

'I suppose you ought to be getting back to England soon? You have business that will want your attention.'

'Oh, confound the business; it may do the best it can. Most important business of my life is here, if I have a chance.'

'You are quite right; it is.'

'Lots of beggars are so stupid in that way,' he goes on, glad that I agree with him. 'They'll work and worry their lives out to get an extra hundred a year, but only just give the odds and ends of their time to winning the woman they like, and are rather ashamed of giving them. Can't think how it is they don't see that getting a woman they want to spend all their days with is an important bit of business. Well, Molly!' he exclaims, as with a sudden determination to change the subject, 'are you better?' and he puts his fingers under her chin just as he did in the railway carriage the day we left England.

Molly looks up at him with wonder look in her eyes. 'I am so sleepy,' she says, drawing back into my arms. I loosen my shawl to make a soft place among its folds for her head, and in a moment or two she has dozed off again.

'Is she any better?' he asks.

I try to answer, but my lips tremble, and no sound comes from them. I shake my head, and the tears are in my eyes before I manage to speak. 'No, she's not better—not yet.' I couldn't bear to tell him.

The sardine's face grows soft and tender, as if with one pure strong love understanding of other loves had come more clearly.

'Don't give in,' he says, almost affectionately, holding out his hand to me. 'You have got along so far, don't give in now. Perhaps she'll get all right again when the spring comes. There's never any knowing;' and he grasps my hand and gives it a long, kindly shake. 'I shan't believe in things any more if she—doesn't get well after we have tried so hard to set her on her feet. But don't be down-hearted; she'll pick up again all right——'

A door at the side of the patio opens, and Helen Josephs stands hesitating, with a book in her hand. The sardine jumps up when he sees her, and his face turns scarlet.

'Oh—I heard you were here alone, Mrs. Keith, so I thought I would bring my book and come and keep you company,' she says awkwardly.

'All right, do come,' the sardine says; 'I am going away. I thought you had gone out again,' he adds, turning to Helen. 'Saw you setting out about half an hour ago.'

'I know; but a horrid little boy at the corner threw stones at me, and it made me so cross that I came back.'

'Little beast!' exclaims the sardine, shaking his hand with an imaginary stick in it. 'Should like to catch hold of him. Well, I suppose you ladies want to talk,' he adds reluctantly. 'Got a nice book?' After all, he cannot resist hanging about her while he can make an excuse to do so.

'Mr. Bicknell lent it to me. It is Spanish, and I wanted to try and learn a little; it is a very easy language.'

He takes the book and looks at it. 'Lope de Vega's "La Corona Tragica." Well, that's what I call giving a good bold jump into the middle of a literature, if you don't know the language. Much too difficult. You ought to get something easy and let me help you a bit.' The sardine is an excellent linguist, so he is not boasting. 'Wonder where he got this from? it's not a lively work, or particularly new.'

'It was down here; he found it in one of the corners.'

'Perhaps some Spanish beggars left it behind. It's the sort of thing they'd like,' he says to me. 'All about Mary Queen of Scots, and how Queen Elizabeth let out at the Protestants. Just the sort of thing the Spaniards would pick out to read, though

Lope de Vega wrote lots of other things, you know, with no swearing at Protestants in them at all.'

'I didn't think you would know all about Lope de Vega, Mr. Cohen,' she says, in surprise.

'I don't,' he answers eagerly, anxious not to get more credit than he deserves. 'I only know, of course, that he was a great swell and wrote all manner of things in an hour or two—two thousand comedies or something, didn't he?—and that among other little rewards he was made Familiar of the Inquisition? A nice kind of reward that; shows the sort of thing these Spaniards love by way of amusement.'

'Yes, but that is more than two hundred years ago,' she says, with a shudder.

'You see,' he says, turning to me, 'we were one of the main props of the Inquisition, so we have an affectionate regard for its memory as an institution.'

'Have you read any other Spanish poets, Mr. Cohen?'

'No, I think not. A little bit of Calderon, I suppose. Oh yes, and there was another old gentleman, good deal older than Lope de Vega, who wrote a long poem about his young woman, who was dead. He carried about a lock of her hair, counted the hairs in it every day, wept over it and hung it up to dry.'

'Nonsense,' she laughs.

'He did indeed, or he wrote a poem about some-

one who did. I'll tell you his name in a moment; —it's Garcilaso de la Vega. That's all the Spanish literature I know,' concludes the sardine, with great contentment; 'but I'll learn some more, if you like, and give you lessons in Spanish. We might read some stories, now, modern ones, much easier than that stuff—more lively;' and he points to her book with easy contempt.

'Are you fond of reading?' she asks.

'No; I rather hate it,' he answers. 'But one must do a little sometimes.'

'Why do you hate it?'

'Always seems rather like waste of time,' he answers; 'much better do your thinking for yourself than get it second-hand from books. Just as many things in the world to think about as ever there were, and a good many more. Too much reading only spoils one's originality.'

'But so many wise men have thought things that have been of help and comfort.'

'Ah, that's another matter. Better get help and comfort anywhere they turn up, no matter where it is; then of course there's a good deal of——' he looks at me and hesitates—'history and that sort of thing must be read up.'

'But poetry and all that—don't you think it helps us to shape our lives?'

'A good healthy set of instincts does that, and

you can adapt your instincts to the latest fashion of living, more than you can the poetry.'

'Why did you learn so many languages, if you don't care for books?'

'Wanted to talk. It would be a bore to be in a country and have to hold your tongue because you had been too lazy to learn the language. Besides, I like to understand people and have dealings with them.'

'Mr. Bicknell is always reading,' Miss Josephs remarks.

'Oh yes, I know; he's that kind of beggar.'

'He's very nice.'

'Yes.'

'And so kind. He took a great deal of trouble about my Spanish this morning.'

The sardine flushes again, and makes a dash. 'So will I, if you like,' he says. 'I didn't know you cared about it.'

'I shouldn't like to take up your time, Mr. Cohen,' she answers demurely; 'and then, you don't care for reading.'

'I'll care for anything you like,' he says. 'I'll look about and see if I can pick up some novels.'

'But it's so much trouble.'

'It's no trouble at all, unless you would rather go on with Bicknell.'

'Oh no,' she says, and looks a little awkward,

evidently remembering that it is not two hours since she refused him. 'If you really don't mind——' she begins.

'I don't mind anything; you know that,' he says, in a low voice. 'I am afraid I have spoilt your chat with Mrs. Keith,' he goes on, remembering me. 'I'll get out of the way now.'

She looks at me doubtfully when he is gone, as if wondering how much I know, and I am in doubt what to do. Nothing is so uncertain as a love-affair; abuse will sometimes do more than praise, silence than words. Almost without meaning it, I rush into the midst of things.

'Why did you refuse him?' I ask her straight.

She starts, and looks almost frightened. 'Did he come and tell you, Mrs. Keith?'

'Yes. He is a great friend of mine.'

'I know,' she answers quickly.

'You do not know what a good fellow he is, and what a true heart he has. Oh, my dear, I wish you could love him.'

'I never thought about him, Mrs. Keith; I was so astonished when he suddenly asked me to marry him.'

'He half expected—nay, quite expected—to be refused,' I tell her; 'but he wanted you to know that he loved you. He has done so for a long time. He told me of it months ago now.'

'Oh no,' she says, 'that can't be——'

I try to get up with the child in my arms, meaning to lay her where she can sleep more comfortably, but I stagger and almost fall back. Nellie comes quickly forward, and taking Molly gently from me puts her down on one of the low divans, covering her with a wrap, and putting some cushions round to keep her safe and cosy. She looks almost maternal as she does it, and yet she is very simple and girlish. Perhaps it is her womanliness and gentleness that have caught the sardine. 'It must be such a wonderful thing to have a little child of one's own,' she says. It is rather an odd remark for a girl to make, and the moment she has made it the blood rushes to her face, as if she had felt its oddness.

'Tell me why you refused him,' I say, as she comes back and sits down by me. 'He is such a good fellow.'

'I know he is good, but I never dreamt of him. He never seemed like a man to fall in love with; he is too practical, and he looks rather old.'

'He is not more than two or three and thirty; but he does look a good deal older. And you, dear?'

'I am twenty-two.'

'And you look younger; you might be eighteen. I wonder you are not married already.'

'I was so much with my mother. She was ill

for years, and we were never apart; till after she died I never saw any one but my father. When he was not yachting he was thinking of politics, or something in which he was particularly interested.'

'And that has been your life?'

'Yes, till last year. Last season I went about a good deal with aunt. My father wished me to go out, and to learn to receive people for him at home. You must come and see us when we are all back in London. You will, won't you, dear Mrs. Keith?'

'Yes,' I answer; 'when we are all back in London I will go to see you. But tell me about Mr. Cohen.'

'You seem so anxious about him, Mrs. Keith.'

'Yes, dear, I am; I will tell you why.' For I do not see why she should not know how good the sardine has been to us. It may help to make matters right; I turn round and look at her face to see if she will understand, and am satisfied. 'I will tell you all about him,' I say—'how good he has been to us, and how he first told me about you.'

So I tell her of Molly's illness, and the money troubles, the visit to Mr. Beccles, and Alice Grey; of my sending the telegram to the sardine; of his coming as fast as he could in a hansom, and of how that same afternoon he told me of his liking for her. She puts her hand softly into mine when I have finished.

'I did not think he was so tender-hearted,' she says. 'Aunt used to say that he was slangy and vulgar, but I shall always think of that story, and look up to him a little bit in future.' She stands hesitating, as if still thinking it over. 'I wish he didn't look so lanky and so satisfied about things,' she says, with a sigh.

'I fear he is not very satisfied about things just now,' I answer. 'But I suppose looks make a great difference to a young girl.'

'Unless she is very matter-of-fact.'

'Or a great idealist.'

'Oh, Mrs. Keith,' she exclaims, 'don't you think that the idealist above all people worships beauty, or, at any rate, wants something that can be idealised into beauty? I always think that if ever I marry I should like my husband to look like a hero as well as to act like one.'

'Just a young girl's fancy,' I answer. 'The matter-of-fact people, I suppose, merely want a certain number of qualities that will bear wear and tear to mate with, and, seeing that they get them, are satisfied.'

'And the idealist?' she asks eagerly, so that I, remembering the yearning sounds that are in her playing, wonder whether it is, after all, her own voice that unconsciously cries out in them, and not, as I have imagined, some strange one held prisoner

in the music, just for a few moments finding expression.

'To the idealist, it does not matter, for he gives his love to the highest beauty—that beauty that raises all physical things to its own height.'

'But mere goodness is not beauty,' she says. 'And oh! Mrs. Keith, what little things can master us.'

I look up in surprise; I do not understand her. In this little girl there is something more than simplicity. I am silent, feeling that what the sardine's chances are I cannot even guess, and that Fate is too big a thing to try to coax or play with.

When she is gone, I sit and think it all over again. After all, perhaps, one chance is set on the way this afternoon. Say what she will, there is a beauty in goodness that speaks to the idealist's heart, even when it is the longing heart of a girl; a beauty that, once recognised, will grow in the seer's sight quietly and almost unsuspected, till nothing else is satisfying; and physical beauty, and scholarly lore, and all things stand aside and make way for their master.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It is ungrateful and unnatural, but I am longing sadly for every one to go and leave me alone with Molly. The strain of seeing all these people, of talking and hearing them talk, of hearing them laugh and plan for future days, is sometimes more than I can bear. If they would only be happy and go away. Grateful? Yes, indeed, I am very grateful for all their kindness; but oh, if they would go. They do not any of them know how hopeless it is; they think she has had a bad attack, but is slowly recovering. 'The world is full of people who have been delicate children,' Mr. Vincent remarked yesterday. They are sorry enough for her, but do not see, as my eyes do, the little change day by day, and all the signs that tell that the end is coming and is not very far away. If they would only go, if I might be alone, with only Dr. Murray's keen eyes to watch, then I could bear it and be calm.

But my wish will soon be accomplished; the 'Flying Dutchman' is to be ready next week, and the day after to-morrow the Vincents go. It is hard

to think of saying good-bye to May—to May, whose bright living presence comforts me more than I can say, and whose sympathy would be sweet enough had I the heart to ask it. But I would not tell her how things are for all the world, to dim her happiness even for an hour. It has been a comfort that we fell among these kind people; the few months have had both hope and happiness in them, but now I am longing for every one to go. I want to be alone with Molly; to see no face and hear no voice but hers; to live each moment with never a thought or sign or sound of others to come between—that is the one desire of my heart.

Meanwhile she is better, and a breath of comfort comes, and every time she is the least shade brighter, almost unknown to myself a ray of hope comes too, and lights up every moment till she is worse again. To-day she seems stronger and sits among the cushions, looking out of window, so I breathe again, and begin to think of May, and wonder why it is I have seen but little of her these last two or three days. Perhaps she is busy or taken up with Ralph, or thinks I have visitors enough. But her absence makes me uneasy, because of a word the sardine let drop yesterday; it strikes me that something may be wrong between her and Ralph. 'They cannot be so foolish,' I think; 'and yet until they are safely married they will never be out of danger.'

At last, seeing that Molly is comfortable, I leave her for a moment, meaning to slip downstairs and see if May is in the patio, to bring her back for a while. Just as I open the door there is the sardine. I can send the message by him.

'Oh yes,' he says, 'I'll tell her. Should say she is sure to be somewhere about, if she isn't ill, for she has given up going out with Bicknell this last day or two. Well, Molly?' and he comes in, 'how are you, little one?'

'I am quite well,' Molly answers, looking out of window.

'That's right,' he says heartily. 'I'll buy you a big doll next time I see one.'

'May knows about the dolls,' she answers.

'Is anything the matter with May?' something makes me ask. 'You speak as if she had not been out lately.'

'She says she has headaches, and that sort of thing.'

'You are not very sympathetic, Mr. Cohen,' I say, half amused at his manner.

'Oh yes, I am, only it always seems such a pity that women fritter away their constitutions in headaches and neuralgia, and all the rest of it, which, after all, don't count for much. Be far wiser to have a good round illness with a find-sounding name, and have done with it, as a man does when he's

about it—something really to be ill for, and to boast of when you are better.'

'But one can't choose these things.'

'No, I suppose not; though there's never any knowing what a woman can choose, or what she can't choose, or anything else. I must go, Mrs. Keith. I'll tell Miss Vincent you want her. Good-bye, Molly.' A few minutes later May enters.

I see in a moment that something has happened. She looks quite different; the happy light has gone from her eyes, and something defiant has taken its place; there is an expression that is almost hard round her mouth, though it softens when she stoops to take up Molly.

'You thought I had forgotten you, dear Mrs. Keith, I know; but I had not, and was just coming to you when your message reached me.'

'I saw Mr. Cohen on the stairs just as I was going to you myself. He said you had had a headache.'

'Oh, it was nothing. Mr. Cohen is a wonderful person; he is always walking up and down stairs, or restlessly wandering about outside. Just now I believe he is cross because Nellie has been talking to Ralph.'

'Come and talk to me,' Molly says, feeling that she is being neglected.

'Yes, I will, dear, for I must tell you something,'

she says, sitting down with Molly on her lap. 'Molly, this is nearly the last time I shall see you; only to-morrow and the day after to-morrow, then the great ship will come, we shall go away—right away, dear—but we shall see each other again in England.'

'But why are you going?' asks Molly.

'Because my father and mother are going,' she answers. 'I cannot stay behind, can I? You could not stay behind and let mother go, could you?'

'No, I never could,' Molly says, shaking her head.

'And that is how it is with me,' she answers—'that is just how it is, Molly; but I shall write to you. I shall write you a long letter, to tell you all about my brothers and sisters, how the dolls are, and if the dolls' house is still there on the top of the cupboard.'

'Why don't the dolls live in the house?' Molly asks.

'Because the house is too small and the dolls are too large, and so the poor house has no people to live in it, and the poor dolls have no house to live in.'

'Yes; do go on,' Molly says eagerly.

May hesitates for a moment, as if wondering what to say next; trying hard not to show that anything is the matter, she goes on. 'And the

worst of it is,' she says, 'the worst of it is, dear Molly, that the dolls will never grow any smaller, and the house will never grow any larger, so that the dolls will always stay outside, and the house will never have any one inside; but when I write I will tell you some more.'

'Have you been crying?' Molly asks suddenly, in the direct manner in which children go at things.

'Crying?' she says, colouring; 'why should I cry?'

'I thought perhaps you had been crying because you were going away.'

'Perhaps I have,' May answers. 'I am very sorry to go. It is a dear little place. Oh, Mrs. Keith!' she exclaims, looking round at me, 'I shall be so sorry to go. I have been so happy here. Shall you cry when you go, Molly?'

'I don't know,' Molly answers vaguely; 'perhaps I shall if mother does.'

'You dear little thing, and do you always cry when mother does?'

'No, not always; but I always want to,' Molly answers. 'What else shall you tell me about when you write?' she asks.

'I'll tell you about the woods and the primroses and the violets; they will all be blooming when we go home, and the daffodils——'

'And the snowdrops?' asks Molly. 'We had some snowdrops in our garden once, but they died.'

'There will be no snowdrops when we go back,' May sighs; 'they will all be over.'

'Poor snowdrops. There are tears in your eyes; are you crying for the snowdrops?'

'No, darling, not for the snowdrops;' then she suddenly bursts into tears. 'I don't want to go, Molly,' she sobs. 'I have been so happy here with you and mother and every one; I don't want to go and leave you all.' She puts Molly down by the window again and comes over to me. 'Oh, Mrs. Keith!' she exclaims, sitting down at my feet, 'I have so wanted to come to you these last few days, but I didn't because I didn't want to tell you about Ralph.'

'What about him, dear?'

'It's all off—all off and ended for ever, and it will never come right again.'

'But why, and how?'

'Don't ask me too much about it; I feel as if I can't get over it. He doesn't care for me—he doesn't really. I ought to have felt and seen that long ago, only I have so trusted his few spoken words; I would have staked my life on them—I did,' she cries passionately. 'But he doesn't care; I think for one reason because he doesn't choose to care; it is all over, and it will never, never come

right again. See!'—and she holds up her hand to show me that the ring is gone from her finger—'I gave it him back.'

'And he took it?'

'Yes. He had been quite different for days; perhaps it made me different to him. It seemed as if he was trying to show me that he didn't care, and at last my pride took fire. Yesterday it came to a quarrel, and he said it was always the way, that we were not in the least suited to each other, and he thought it was a great pity that we did not recognise the fact. I thought he wanted to end it, so I took off my ring and threw it over, saying, "Perhaps you would like to have this back?" He said, "Thank you," picked it up, put it into his pocket, and walked away; and since we have been just polite and formal, nothing more.' She stops and looks at her finger. 'Oh, my dear ring, if I only had it back!' she exclaims, kissing the place where it has been. 'I will never forgive him; it is all over, Mrs. Keith, but I shall never care for any one else—never while I live.'

'Why do you like him? I cannot understand why you care for him so much.'

She considers for a minute or two, and when she looks up, her mouth is hard, but there are tears in her eyes again. She is an odd contradiction; and how pretty she looks, and how loveable.

'He has been all my life,' she says. 'It is too

late now to consider why it is—it is too late; but this is the end of it all.'

'Do you think he has really cared for you all these years?'

'He told me so,' she answers, 'I never dreamt of doubting him. He is a truthful man. Why should I? He must be weak and wavering, he cannot know his own mind,' she says scornfully, 'and he may go. It all seems so foolish when I think of it that I hate myself for caring for him. But this is the end. I have made up many quarrels, but this one I will not make up.'

'But he will?'

'No, he will not,' she says, and a light seems to shoot from her eyes. 'He hasn't it in him. I don't believe he has the courage that is needed to take the first step. He would call it pride to himself,' she adds scornfully; 'he would call it pride that makes him hold aloof. Let him call it what he likes. A man who loves a woman thinks nothing too much to do for her, but he—— Let him keep his pride, since he likes it best—he may go. He does not satisfy me any more; he is not good enough. I want something better to give my best love to. Oh, it is too humiliating to remember all the things that I have said to him'—and she clasps her hands—'I meant them too, I meant them all. I thought there was no one like him on earth, but I shall never think

it any more; I never can.' She stops for a minute. 'Don't let us talk of it,' she says.

'But you are going the day after to-morrow; and he?' I ask, thinking that she must love or hate him very much to be so scornful.

'He is going to stay here a week or two longer.' She gets up suddenly. 'There, it is all over. Dear little Molly, I shall come and see you again to-night, perhaps, or to-morrow;' with her head erect she turns to go, but in a moment she hesitates. 'Mrs. Keith,' she says gently, 'don't think me unkind to Ralph, or unforgiving. I am not indeed. I have loved him all my life, just Ralph and no one else, and I shall never love any one else while I live; but I know now that he does not care for me, and I will never be anything to him again. While he cared I could have borne anything; but he does not, and I will bear nothing.'

When she is gone I sit down by the window in dismay, wondering if anything can be done, and how it will all end.

Why is it that sane men and women will sometimes play so recklessly with their own and each other's happiness? So few chances of happiness come to any of us. I do not think Ralph and May are of the type to whom many chances come; they do not take things easily enough for that. Why will they let their little feelings govern them?

And how will it end if they do not make up their quarrel? As for May, she will marry—she is not the sort of woman to remain single; but the world will never be the same for her if she misses the man of her heart: it is never the same again for any woman. She may marry from ambition, or from gratitude, perhaps, some good man who loves her over-well; or from the aching desire to make someone happy, to be of use in the world, to be the centre of a home in which all things shall be as bright and happy as hands and heart can make them; from a dozen other reasons, but for love—no! That chance comes but once to the women who love best, if it ever comes at all. So much good love as there is in the world, given away, wasted, lived over in silence and in secret, and never a sign made and never a word spoken; good love and true that is a little shadow on all the bright days, that is an aching sorrow through all the long dark hours of sickness, till death comes and takes the unsatisfied life to itself. A terrible wealth of love has Death. Why will our foolishness so often grudge a fuller measure to life?

Sometimes I think that Ralph is disappointed in life; that he is half ashamed to drain dry the commonplace joys and sorrows of every day. He seems to think that nothing he has yet discovered is important enough for so great a place as the

world, for so wonderful a thing as his own consciousness. I watched him one day when we were all in the patio downstairs, reading the English papers. We could see into the room where the visitors sometimes sit. Mr. and Mrs. Walters were there, she working, as usual, at the delicate muslin, he trying to draw a portrait of her. Ralph looked at them anxiously from behind his paper. There was a certain dull disappointment written on his face, a dim conviction of the monotony of the ordinary lives of fairly well-to-do, well-educated people of the class to which he belonged. Was this all that life gave or promised to the majority, this pleasant even way, the smiles and tears and little cooings and petty vexations and illnesses, or the meetings and partings, which were all that he could imagine the future holding for these two people? Was this all that life had to give, or the splendid world to offer? Was it for them and the like of them with their little joys and sorrows that the world had gone on for so long, was going on for perhaps centuries and centuries yet? There were heights and depths, no doubt, great men and great deeds, but these did not make up the world; for all that they visibly affected the great majority, they might never exist at all. For ordinary folk there were the great plains and the straight paths, with sunshine here and shadow there, from birth to death.

What was the good of it all, or worth to the individual to live? It seemed almost insulting that a man should be expected to accept life with these conditions. But there was no probability of Fate making an exception in her dull routine for him; the monotony, the even-going life, the quiet death, the well-regulated mourning, the certain forgetfulness—these were all that it would give him, all that it gave others. He was impatient with those others for being content with so little. It was odd how plainly all these thoughts seemed written on his face.

I think now he is vexed with May for taking what seem to him but trifling things so seriously; he is vexed because she is so happy, so cast down, so piqued. He looks on at other people's lives in a philosophic vein enough, and thinks that there is nothing worth stirring their pulses about. There is a certain narrowness about him, too. He is one of those men who do not understand natures different from their own, still less does he sympathise with them, and he has contemplated things so long from an outside point of view that few things touch him nearly; even his own vexations, after the first few moments, cease to make him smart; he contemplates them, too, from the point of view of an interested spectator. With all this, I believe that he loves May as much as he is capable of loving any one, but

he has old-fashioned notions concerning women; he thinks that they should be submissive, not merely towards their husbands, but towards all men. He is not sure that they are not an inferior race—a race to be made much of in certain ways, and provided for and looked after, but at the same time distinctly a race to be controlled by the stronger one. He dislikes women who contradict him, even though they are in the right; he likes them to look up to him and obey him, not merely from affection or as a concession, but because he is a man, and therefore a superior authority.

I have watched Ralph so many times these last few weeks, and wondered why May, with her bright nature and high spirit, loved him so much. And yet I do not wonder. There is about him a certain dogged uprightness, a stubborn truthfulness, a courage of many kinds, though in some of the finer intricate kinds he is deficient—a something that makes it easy to understand a woman loving him with all her heart. Perhaps his very faults make the love all the easier; no woman yet has loved a man right well who has not, almost unknown to herself, loved him all the better for finding that he was not perfect. The very uncertainty of his temper, of his ways, of his words, have made him all the more loveable to May perhaps, as they would to many others of her sex. The thing we cannot lose is

seldom the thing we love best of all, and seldom will be while the world is full of tender, wayward women.

If May were only a different type of woman I should be less sorry for her; if she were likely to grieve and forget, and to give her heart elsewhere. But this will never be. Mrs. Vincent was right in saying that only a great love satisfied would prevent her life from becoming tragic. The great love has been given in her case, and the end of the story is doubtful. She has been humble enough to him, right or wrong, a hundred times I know, for she has told me so; but a limit comes to all things, and it has come to her humility. She will not give in this time; there was something written on her face this morning which showed that. Men often think they know women; yet so little they sometimes understand that, if at last she is roused, a woman can be cold and bitter and scornful, even while she loves best. The love is like a prisoner in a cell, seeing the things that are done outside it, but powerless to interfere.

'There is Mr. Bicknell, mummy dear,' Molly says; and, looking up, I see Mr. Josephs and his daughter slowly pass the church opposite, talking to Ralph, who is with them. He sees us, waves his hand to Molly, and passes on.

CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was something very strange in Dr. Murray's manner this morning. He is an odd, self-contained man, but I cannot help fancying that he has taken a violent dislike to me. It is almost visible in his manner; it is a manner that shows he somehow doubts me, but how or why I cannot tell. He spoke to me this morning about Molly.

'My brother tells me that you insisted on knowing the exact state of your child,' he said.

'Yes,' I answered, trembling; for, do what I will, I cannot still my quaking limbs at the mention of what is coming—'yes, I know perfectly what her condition is, as far as words can tell me.'

'He is very sorry for you,' he said slowly.

'I know he is; he is so good. I cannot tell you how kind he has been to us. He is very fond of children, and makes them fond of him. Molly quite loves him.' Speaking of Dr. George put me off my guard, and I forgot that I was speaking to this formal brother.

'I am glad to hear that he has been of use to

you,' he answered. 'He is, as you say, always very kind to children, or to any one in any sort of trouble.'

'Yes,' I answered. There was something almost unpleasant in his manner.

'He tells me that you did not wish any one to know her condition. May I ask why? I should have thought, as no doubt there are some here with whom you are intimate, that you would have been glad to get the sympathy of one of your own sex, for instance. It is a sad thing to see any one so utterly alone as you appear to be.' He said the last words in a kinder voice than the first ones.

'There is no one here whose knowing it would make any actual difference; and sympathy could do me no good—I am better without it. No matter how many people know of them, the great sorrows of life have to be borne alone.'

He was silent for a few minutes. 'Mrs. Keith,' he said slowly, 'you are young to have no relations, no ties at all in the world except your child.'

'Yes. I have had none these last years, except my children. There were never many at best; but they were enough,' I added, for the memory of the happy days flashed across me.

'And have you no friend in the world who could come out to you?'

'No, not one. Perhaps I have known Mr. Cohen and Mr. Bicknell, who are here, longer than other

people; they are very old friends of mine. Mr. Cohen has been one of my best and truest friends, but I have no claim on his time, and he has other concerns; besides, I want to be alone. I shall be better alone.'

'But, Mrs. Keith, have you no relations or friends of your own sex?'

'No. I have one kind friend, but she is in Australia; and I have a cousin, Mrs. Grey—she lives in London.'

'Would not she come to you?'

The question made me almost smile. 'No—no, she would not come,' I said; 'she would think it too much trouble.'

'And is this why you wish my brother to stay?'

'I!' I exclaimed, with a start. 'I know nothing about his staying or going. Dr. Murray, what have I to do with it?'

'Then I wish you would persuade him to go to England,' he said. 'I came back here at great inconvenience to myself, in order that he might go. He telegraphed to me not to come, but still I came.'

'Why?'

'There is a post in London which he is almost certain to get if he shows himself and applies for it. But I cannot persuade him to go.'

'Why not?'

'Because of your child; because he thinks he may be of use to you.'

'Did he tell you so?'

'Not in actual words, but he implied it, and I know that that is the reason.'

'Dear Dr. George, how good he is.'

'It is ruining his career,' he said coldly.

'But, Dr. Murray, I would rather he went. I want every one to go. The only longing I have left in the world is to be quite alone. It is very, very kind of him, but I would rather he went. He can do no good by staying; no one can.'

No,' he repeated slowly; 'no one can do any good. Then you will use your influence to make him go?'

'My influence? but I have no influence with him.'

The look of doubt crept over his face again. 'He is staying on your account,' he answered, 'and missing, perhaps, the great opportunity of his life.'

'Let me talk to him. Ask him to come and see me, and I will make him go. He can do no good, and I want to be away from even my best friends on earth. I will tell him so.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'I will tell him what you have said, and I will ask him to come over and see you to-night. You will do him a great service by

insisting on his going, and at once. He ought to have gone before.'

I think his manner was better after that, but I do not like him, and never shall.

I shall miss Dr. George sorely; but perhaps, even from the selfish point of view, it is better that he should go too. I begin to realise now how kind he has been to us, and am half afraid to think of what the silence and loneliness will be without him. The others, good and kind though they are, I want to go. I feel so pent up, so unnatural while they are all here; but Dr. George—well, he shall go too; he must go now—it would make me miserable if he stayed.

In the afternoon Nellie Josephs offers to play a little while; it seems as if she has done the one thing in the world that could rest and soothe me. And so she begins, and as Molly and I lean back and listen, the old blessed dreaminess steals over me, and all things present melt away. So far we go, into strange lands, within reach of faint perfumes, that link the land we dream in to the land we dream of, for between the golden fruit and the smooth dark leaves on the orange-trees below, the white blossom is opening and filling the air with its fragrance. How some music has power to open the unseen doors —doors through which the sounds wander away, so that you hardly hear them until it seems as if a soft

hand touched you, or some unknown voice whispered to you, and then, listening, you rise and hurry after the music, almost faint in the distance. And by it you guide yourself on and on into the places where sweet sounds are and soft dreams stay before they steal across the sleeper's brain at night. The silent voices of all our dear ones speak there, the vanished faces look at us once again, and those who have loved us and have perchance forgot steal near, and for a moment the days of old come back. And there are strange tracts of country waiting for the painter to see and paint, and words which only poets may hear and write down; and oh, somewhere through those doors is peace—peace and rest and happiness that were all our own, but that a chain holds us fast.

Suddenly the sounds cease, and the doors are shut, and I look round half dazed. It is but my soul that has been wandering away, seeing and hearing a hundred things that I, who am here, cannot grasp or understand. Just one thing now and again flashes across me, but that is all, and I wonder what the strange thought means, or why these words seem familiar, or why my eyes half recognise that picture. For the dull senses cannot understand how the swift spirit has been on apace, and has seen and heard and returned, but perforce keeps its journeying half a secret.

She stops for a few moments, and then she plays

a little bit of Schumann. With a start I awake and listen. Long since, one I loved best translated a passionate song of Heine's and set it to this music. He is a difficult poet to translate, and perhaps this was not very well done, and yet the words are written on my heart, and will be while I live:

'Sweet, when I look at you,
Into your eyes;
All my pain, fearing you,
Passes and flies.
* * * *
'When your soul tells me you
Love me at last,
Darling, my tears will flow
Bitter and fast.'

Oh, Molly, I cannot bear it; I cannot—cannot—and I put my face down on the cushions and sob, as every note sinks into my heart.

All the evening I have been wondering what to say to Dr. George. I will put it entirely on my own shoulders, or perhaps he will not hear me or agree to do what is best. I will not say that his brother has spoken; only tell him that I want to be alone, and that it is better for me that he should go.

It is late when he comes. I always think when he enters that he finds it some sort of rest, for he sits down with a look of content in his eyes, like a man who is at home among his own people.

'Dr. George,' I ask, 'when are you going to England?'

'Not yet,' he answers.

'Why not yet?'

'I like being here.'

'But you will be too late. You will lose your chance of getting that post if you delay much longer.'

'Never mind; it does not matter,' he says quietly. 'Something else will turn up in time.'

'But tell me why you stay. You would like the appointment, and your brother says you would be sure to get it. Why don't you go?'

'I want to stay here.'

'But tell me why?' I say half-entreatingly.

He hesitates for a moment. 'I want to watch Molly. She knows me now, and I am fond of her. I was always fond of children,' he adds apologetically, and then he is silent.

Dr. Murray is right. I see it all in a second. He is waiting because his heart is too tender to leave a little child. But his career shall not be injured for us. Besides, he can do no good; we are only keeping him from those to whom he might be of use—from the whole world, which will surely be the better for him.

'I wish you would go,' I say. 'I want you to go, and every one to go, and leave me alone with Molly.

I told you it was easier, that it would be easier, if none knew or looked on.'

'But I have known all this time; why should I not stay a little longer? I cannot bear to go and leave you to come home alone,' he answers, an intense longing to help and comfort me betraying itself in his voice.

'It will be far better,' I say; 'it will be better and kinder to go. I would rather that you did. I should like no one to be here who cared for her. Dr. Murray is cold and formal.'

I did not mean to say it; the words slipped out unawares. He hastens to defend his brother.

'He does not mean it,' he says. 'It is only manner and temperament; it is not want of feeling. He has been so anxious about you too, even more than about Molly.'

'I know; but it will be far better for me—better that I should have him near me rather than you; better that I should know that I must not give way, or he will despise me. Oh, Dr. George, if you would do what I wish most, you will go. It will help me most.'

'But I shall think of you so. Let me stay,' he pleads. 'You cannot make that long journey home alone. Let me stay and help you, and take you. I cannot bear to think of you here alone after——' He puts out his hands as if to touch mine, but

quickly draws them back, afraid, and stops. I look up at him, and in his eyes there is an infinite pity, a longing, a something that I cannot define, the expression of a tender, manly nature that loves, and is not ashamed of loving, a little child—an understanding of all that is and is to come. It sets me swiftly thinking of the refuge and help that some women must find in their brothers; but I had never one to help me.

'I want you to go,' I repeat. 'I want to be quite alone. If you would do the best and kindest thing of all for me, go. I want to be alone with Molly; to feel that no one will care or sympathise, or come in at odd moments with words of kindness that would be worse than reproaches and blows.'

He is silent for a minute. 'I will do what you wish me to do, however hard it is,' he says.

'Then go,' I answer, holding out my hand. 'It is better; it is far better.'

He is silent, and stands hesitating. 'Your child is all the world to you?' he says, with a sigh.

'Oh yes, the whole wide world.'

'And no one else is of any good to you or help?'

'No, I think not. It is hard to say it; but it is not because I am ungrateful. If I had room for other feelings, if Molly were well, if things had been bright and prosperous, I could have cared for my friends more. I have no room now for anything or

any one in my heart or life but the child.' I stop for a moment, but he is silent and I go on. 'But I am grateful, I am very grateful, dear Dr. George, for all that you have done and been to me. The days would have been very different without you. It will always be something to know that a clever man like you, with so much to think about as you have, could care for a little child like Molly. I shall always remember it.'

'You will let me see you when you come home?' he asks, speaking as if he had hardly been listening to my last words.

'Yes.'

'And you will come—you will come?' he says, and in his voice there is something like pain and terror.

'Yes, I shall come. I want to walk through the rooms at home once more and see the rocking-horse and the picture. I wonder if it has changed. I shall come. Oh, I must see it all once more,' I cry, clasping my hands.

'Very well,' he says slowly. 'Then I will go, since you wish it—it is only because you wish it—and I will wait for you there. I will not come after to-night to say good-bye to you or Molly. Let me take my last look now. Promise me you will come?' he almost beseeches. What does he mean?

'I promise,' I answer; 'but there is no necessity

to promise. You do not know or understand;—there are things calling me just as if they had human voices.'

He is silent again, a long dreary silence; at last, sad and loth, he gets up to go, and I look at him with a long, long look, for in my heart there is a secret, and I dread and fear lest he should guess it. If he only goes to-morrow. Oh, my good and kind friend, why do I wish you away? He walks, without a word more, into Molly's room. I do not follow him, but I can see him stoop and kiss her, just as if she had been his own child, or as if he loved her not only for the sake of her sweetness, but of ties of kinship. He looks round, when he comes back, at the flowers—the flowers he sent—at the little row of books, at Molly's portrait still on the easel.

'I shall remember this room,' he says, 'as long as I live.' Then he wrings my hand. 'Good-bye,' he says. 'I will start to-morrow. I shall think of you. If ever there is an hour in which it comforts you to know that I am with you in thought, know it. Good-bye;' and so he leaves me. I go out into the balcony, and listen, just as I did one night last year, for his footsteps coming round the corner. I hear them come, I see his face turned towards the window. He says 'Good-night,' and waves his hand. I watch him out of sight, I look at the starry sky and over at the white church, and come in and shut the window. It is time to go back to Molly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

To-DAY the Vincents go. The ship arrived this morning; to-night at eleven it sails for Gibraltar. I do not think things are any better between May and Ralph. The former only says, 'Don't let us talk of him, dear Mrs. Keith,' if I mention his name; and the latter I have not seen at all these last few days. I went downstairs this morning, and sat for a long while with Molly in the patio, hoping he might see me; but there was not a sign of him, and we never go into the midday meal now, for Molly is not strong enough to sit it out. It is a strange thing that no one sees her condition; but eyes not sharpened by love are often blind enough.

Dr. George has gone, and, kind and good as he was, it is a relief that he has, for his going lessens the terrible strain upon me. I have dreaded lest he should suspect what it is that carries me through these strange days, and makes me feel that through all the pain and loneliness, through even the last hours here with my little one—through all the agony of the parting, and the long journey home, while she sleeps here, I can walk calmly.

Yet how I miss the kind eyes and the strong face, the almost tender voice and simple, manly nature. There are some people who seem to be born to see and hear and think only the best in those about them. Of aught besides they have no consciousness and in it no belief, so that, ashamed, it slips away before them and vanishes out of sight. Dr. George is one of these: just an ordinary mortal man, yet unwittingly an evangelist to all the lower natures near him. To look at him made me long to be braver and better, and he made me realise as no one else ever could how great was the happiness of the days that are past.

Yes, I miss him, and did not know I had leaned so much on him; but I am thankful he has gone—it is better. . . . I look at Molly and kiss her. . . . My sweet, we shall be alone soon, and how we will live in each other those last, last days, when no one can enter more upon us, except the doctor coming to see how long a time we shall have together—those days when there will be no longer the sound of happy feet and merry laughter up and down the stairs, for the joyousness of other people, that strange sight that is now before my eyes, will have vanished. I feel sometimes as a dead woman might feel taken to see a play, and made to laugh and talk and applaud, able to see and hear and behave as though she were alive, so that the players did not suspect her

of being a corpse. But when the players have gone home, then—then—then a little real life will come back for the days we have yet to spend together. Molly—my Molly, but let us go back to it.

. . . . . .

It is getting late in the afternoon, and the Vincents are coming to say good-bye, and all this time in the next room Mr. Walters is painting the beggars over the way. It is a wonderful thing to awake up from sleep—the sleep that steals over a worn and tired soul like mine—to awake and realise how it has nourished you. Molly and I have been sleeping since one o'clock. We look at each other with a smile. We feel half well again; we will go and see Mr. Walters and the beggars. Get up, dear Molly, and let us go back to the play. . . . I can hear a player speaking.

'You know, my love,' he says, 'that old lady is a most estimable person, but she must be taught to take bolder flights. Perhaps it would be more correct to say she had better be taught the value of weights and measures. To send twenty-five pounds to a place like this, is a mere act of improvidence and folly. A little sum like that one fritters away on purpose when one is abroad, and thinks of no more, so that sending it is just putting temptation in our way, and trying to divert us from the frugal habits we have been at great pains to cultivate.'

'But twenty-five pounds ought to go a good way, Joe.'

'My dear, you might as well try to throw a feather over a high wall as expect that we could travel far on a modest sum like that.'

'But, Joe dear, why don't you write to Aunt Emma yourself?'

'Well, my love, if you wish me to write, I'll write; but it strikes me that there are some few things in which you women beat us men, and one of them is getting money when it is really needed.'

'I wish you would let Mr. Cohen have that picture; you only got fifteen for the fellow to it, and yet you are refusing twenty from him. Twenty pounds would pay our bill here.'

'That's true about the fifteen pounds, my love, but whether twenty pounds will pay our bill here depends a good deal upon the humour Manuela is in when she takes to the composing of that bill.'

'Joe, that woman is a perfect wretch. I heard her say——' and her voice gets lower, but I catch the sound of my own name, and listen against my will; 'and she thought it would be a good thing when it was gone. She had no patience with sick children,' she whispers. They are talking of Molly.

'She is going to marry Don Carlos when we are all gone, that man who owns the flies; and, judging from his looks, I should say he'll let her know who——

Here's Mrs. Keith with her little one. These beggars, Mrs. Keith, are in such a festive state of mind that there is no fitting them into their proper position. It is only this last few minutes that they have been quiet at all.'

I sit and watch the beggars, while Mr. Walters goes on trying to work. It is apparently the same group that has hung round the doorway ever since we came. One is crouching on the ground, not looking up at the passers-by or heeding those who enter the church. Beside him is a man with a withered arm;—the number of withered arms one sees in Spain! He keeps up a constant dirge, but the others are silent; not one of the ragged beings, brown and dusty and dirty, say a word. They only hold out their hands silently, as if trusting to the sight of their wretchedness to touch the passers-by. There seems to be a certain rank among beggars here, as among other people. The aristocracy does not importune; it stands on its own most venerable legs, and those who will not support it, who are not moved to help by the sight of dirt or disease or rags, let them go home and have it out with their consciences. If they will that the poor shall die, and the oldest institution of proud Spain shall vanish, on them be the shame and the reproach; the Church will make it uneasy enough for the callous ones some day. Then there is the middle class, that asks

and whines and follows; and the lowest class, that insults and insists, and will not be sent empty away. And all of these stand on their dignity, and have learnt the ins and outs of polite language, and resent a want of manner even in a donor. The curious thing about it all is that begging seems to rank as an honourable profession, carrying with it a certain demand for consideration, and to suggest that it is a disgrace would, to a Spanish mind, be almost imbecile. I sometimes wonder what Spain would be like without beggars, and with more trees.

'I quite agree with you, Mrs. Keith,' Mr. Walters says. 'But still, there are two things to be said for Spanish beggars: they are excellent to paint, and they enjoy themselves thoroughly. I never look at them but I feel that they must have such a real good time on the whole that they are wise not to give in. To be the whole day long in the sunshine, wear clothes that a gipsy would not steal or a man cast up from the waves put on, have just enough money dropped into your hand to buy food and smoke with, and to go about, if you change your locality, without so much as a carpet-bag—you can bet it is a life that a beggar would be a fool to give up because he is so unfortunate as to have moral instincts. I think myself that moral instincts are overdone, and that if some people did not leave them alone we should have no variety left in the world.'

He must have learnt this talk from the sardine. 'If you consider the thing seriously, you will see that variety is a most important thing, and we should try to preserve it. It would be unfortunate if we were all so much alike that when we got mixed we could not be sorted.'

'Joe!' his wife exclaims; but before she has time to say more Mr. and Mrs. Vincent come to wish us good-bye, and Mrs. Walters signs to her husband to get up.

'I think, as you have now some other friends, we will go for a walk, and finish this picture another time,' he says, moving his easel aside.

'Don't let me disturb you,' Mr. Vincent says; 'we can't stay long. So that is what you have been doing. A very picturesque group; well—well—well! you want time and study, time and study. Good-bye. We shall meet at dinner.'

'I am so tired of that American and his pictures,' Mrs. Vincent says, when they are gone.

'If he painted better, I should not mind him,' Mr. Vincent says. 'But never mind, he'll improve. We are very sorry to leave you, Mrs. Keith,' he says to me; 'but we shall meet again in London, I hope —you and your little girl.' He says the last words doubtfully, but I take no notice.

'Yes, I hope so, I hope so too,' Mrs. Vincent says, with a sigh, and the air of a person who happened to

know that we never should meet again, but did not wish to betray the secret.

Mr. Vincent walks round the room and looks at my little scraps of paintings. He has always been rather complimentary to them, and is now.

'Very pretty, very pretty,' he says. 'A really charming portrait of your little girl—an excellent likeness. And so you never painted Miss Josephs' portrait, after all? Well, well, you must make Josephs buy something before he goes. These rich Jews ought to be made to disgorge; very difficult, though, very difficult indeed. Mr. Walters has been trying it on with Cohen. Ah! he ought to have been here before Mrs. Greenside went. What a woman that was, to be sure. I can't understand why the Bexleys took such a sudden fancy to her.'

'They had reasons,' Mrs. Vincent says. 'Lady Bexley told me so.'

'Well, perhaps they had,' Mr. Vincent says, as if he feels certain there must be some excuse for them somewhere. 'By the way, May has gone to get you some flowers. She said she wanted to make your room look pretty before she went. What a girl she is for flowers.'

'Poor dear May!' Mrs. Vincent says sadly.

'Has she told you anything?' Mr. Vincent asks, looking at me keenly; 'anything about Bicknell?'

'Yes; she told me.'

'They are very foolish. I shall take no notice until we are gone, and then I shall write to him and say this must be the end. It has gone on too long. He has behaved very badly.'

'I almost wonder you have left them to themselves so long,' I cannot help saying.

'Well, you see he is a very good fellow. He has a temper—most men have—but he is a good fellow; very good indeed in many ways, and he has a good position; he is likely to have a still better one; and we must be a little worldly where our children are concerned. Then, I am sure he is very fond of May—as fond of her as he can be of any one, and he has been for years; I don't believe he has ever looked at any one else. He's a good-looking fellow; we all like him, and then,' Mr. Vincent adds after a moment's hesitation, as though he had been considering whether he had summed up all Ralph's advantages before coming to a climax, 'and then she's very fond of him. I am quite sure that it will be a terrible thing for her if it is all broken off. She is a girl who doesn't fall in love easily; but though she has never told me so, I am quite certain that she is devoted to him. I hope they'll make it up; they are admirably suited to each other in many ways. Still, if it isn't made up, I shall write to him from

Gibraltar—he is going to stay here another week—and say we must see no more of him.'

'Wouldn't it be better to speak to him here?'

'No; that won't do. I have considered that over,' Mr. Vincent answers. 'He's a man who would not be forced; besides, her pride would take fire, and, depend upon it, it would only bring things to a wrong end. The best way will be to let them take their course till after we go.'

'Where is he now?'

'He is out, I think. I saw him start for a walk an hour or two ago; but he'll come back to dinner, no doubt.'

Then they both get up to go, and Mrs. Vincent holds my hand and looks at me as if she longed to say a great deal, and Mr. Vincent attempts to say it for her.

'We shall meet in London, and I hope under happier circumstances. Oh, here's May. Well, May?'

She enters with her hands full of flowers, and her arms covered with green boughs. She looks graver than usual, but there is something in her carriage that shows that the part of a love-lorn maiden is the last one on earth she means to play.

'Dear Mrs. Keith,' she says, 'I have brought you some flowers. I want to make your room pretty before

we go, and Molly will remember me at any rate till they fade, won't you, little sweetheart?'

'Yes; and I wish they'd never fade,' Molly answers.

Mr. Vincent watches his daughter as she wanders about the room arranging the flowers in the earthenware Spanish pots. It is always a pleasure to watch her move; Mrs. Greenside first noticed that. She walks as the Arabs do, as all people must walk who are unfettered by fashion and who have no fear of any kind. It is a different walk from the Spanish woman's; that is graceful and suggestive enough, but it is not fearless like May's. Perhaps that is what you feel most about May, that she is fearless. Perhaps in this, seeing how womanly and gentle she is withal, lies at once her charm and her danger. Sometimes when I look at her, and think of her together with Ralph, I think of a beautiful restive horse with a curb on—a curb that may be painful, that may be the means of breaking the high spirit, of taking the light out of the fearless eyes, and yet without it one would dread to think of what would happen.

'We must go,' Mr. Vincent says at last. 'Very sorry to leave you, Mrs. Keith. You must make Mrs. Walters look after you, and we shall meet again.'

Mrs. Vincent looks at me sadly, and says almost

in a whisper, 'I shall think of you a great deal, and I am sorry we are going to leave you, but my husband wants a change. When we get home I shall write to you. May dear, can you help me to pack?'

'Yes, dear mamma; I will come and help you directly. I shall have plenty of time to do my own packing afterwards.'

She has soon finished the flowers; she only talks to Molly, and so I can watch her again. Oh, what a fool Ralph is to miss her, I cry out in my thoughts. He would tire of an ordinary woman in a fortnight, of the sort of woman who would give him the blind agreement and obedience he expects from May, whose eyes are open and see clearly. I do not think he would tire of May, with her bright smiles and proud spirit and passionate tears; the ceaseless demand that the very expression of her face makes, that all the best in him should live, would prevent it. I think, too, that as his love might be the saving of her happiness, so might hers be the making of any greatness that is in him. He would be ashamed enough if those eyes saw any littleness in him.

'I shall come in at half-past nine to-night, to wish you good-bye,' she says, when she has had a little talk with Molly, 'and to kiss Molly in her sleep. We are to leave here soon after ten, so I will come at half-past nine.'

'Dear, are things any better? Have you seen each other, or spoken?'

'Don't ask me,' she whispers, 'I can't bear it.' She clasps her hands; she is trying hard to keep back her tears. 'Don't speak of it. I don't want him to see a sign, but it is breaking my heart. I couldn't bear that he should know or suspect. It is all over, dear Mrs. Keith—over and finished.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

I SIT by the open window—this window by which I seem to have lived many lives in many worlds—and wonder if anything can be done. The expression on May's face still shows that no olive branch will come from her. Nevertheless her scorn is dying away, and bitter disappointment is taking its place.

Suddenly, with a start, I remember that in a few hours the Vincents will be gone. May is in her room packing, and where is Ralph? As if to answer the question, the sardine enters. He has a knack of being in the way when he is wanted.

'Brought you some papers,' he says. 'How is Molly to-night; is she all right?'

He nods at her while he speaks. I nod back; there is nothing to say.

'Your friend Bicknell downstairs is improving the shining hour by giving Nellie a lesson in Spanish. Suppose he thinks he can do it better than I can.'

'Where are they?'

'In the patio, half-a-dozen moths buzzing and banging about the lamp like anything. They don't seem to mind them, though—too much absorbed, I suppose.'

'Why, Mr. Cohen, are you jealous?' I ask, half amused at his manner.

'Not a bit; don't think enough of him for that. Besides, he's in love with the other girl, or was. Perhaps he's altered his mind, or thinks he'd like a change.'

'I don't believe that.'

'No, and I don't really. Besides, Nellie wouldn't look at him; don't believe she'll look at me, much less at him. Still, I think he and the other girl have had a quarrel. The Vincents go to Gibraltar to-night, and he stays here for another week. He looks rather sulky.'

'I dare say they'll make it up, even if they have had a quarrel,' I say, thinking it wise not to know too much.

'Of course they will,' he answers; 'a quarrel doesn't matter a bit—rather do them good. Some people want one occasionally to keep them going; touches up their affections and keeps them in full swing. Like watering flowers to make them grow.'

'Perhaps a little quarrel with Nellie would be a good thing,' I suggest.

'Oh no; that would be quite a wrong line with

her. If she doesn't like me now, she would take good care she didn't if I made myself disagreeable; and if she does, she would only cry and fret and frighten herself—think it wouldn't do to marry me, for fear I should make myself disagreeable constantly, beat her every day, turn her out of doors once a week, and that kind of thing.'

'Nonsense.'

'It isn't nonsense at all,' he answers. 'The line with her is just to be as pleasant as possible. When you get her, take care of her, go on being pleasant, and she'll be all right.' He looks at Molly and hesitates, then pulls out his watch. 'Fear I haven't time now, but I read a story of Pedro the Terrible to-day,—about the oranges; do you know it? I thought it would just do to amuse Molly. I'll come and tell it to her to-morrow.'

'Do; but I shouldn't think that there is any story of Pedro pleasant enough to tell a child.'

'It has that little touch of practical humour that most Spanish stories have. These Spaniards beat us hollow at making their history picturesque. Poor beggar, I am always sorry for Pedro; he had a bad time when he was young. It doesn't do to bully children—makes them vicious when they grow up; they want to take it out of other people.'

'Yes. Mr. Cohen, will you give a little note to Mr. Bicknell for me?' and hastily scratching a

few lines asking Ralph to come to me now or immediately after dinner, I send the sardine away with it.

Will he come? that is the question I sit considering for the next hour; and if he does, what shall I say to him? But as yet there is no sign of him, no footstep, no note. The daylight fades, and I put Molly to bed. I hear the dinner-bell ring at last, and know that he cannot come for some time. My dinner is brought in presently, and on the tray is a little note: 'Will to-morrow do?—R. B.' I write back, 'No; to-night, and soon,' and wait again, trying to sing to Molly, but my voice fails, and then . . . oh, but it doesn't matter; it is only the old story . . . the church bell rings out; it is nine o'clock, at half-past May is coming. I go to the window and look out. A starry sky and a still sea. Far off there is a light on the water; perhaps it is the ship that is to take the Vincents to Gibraltar. It looks like a living thing, waiting and watching for those it is to carry away. A gitana goes by; I can see through the darkness the redness of the handkerchief round her head. She is walking with some crone veiled with the old-fashioned mantilla; she looks like an evil spirit leading the girl away. But that is nonsense; probably she is only taking care of her. Young Andalusia is not slow to see the

sparkle in a gitana's eyes. There are two striplings passing now, they look like students; perhaps they have come for a little holiday. They pass by, smoking and humming cachuchas. They must be students, or they would not be so merry. Suddenly there is a voice.

'Maggie!' Behind me stands Ralph, looking handsome and tall and manly. 'I believe you live out of window like a bird in a cage,' he says, laughing. 'Well, what is it you want to see me so particularly about?'

'Ralph, the Vincents are going to-night,' I say, speaking before I have considered how it will be best to begin.

'I know that,' he says.

'Oh, but, Ralph, you can't let May go like this. You cannot be so cruel.'

'What do you know about it? Has she told you?' he asks, angry in a moment.

'She could not hide it; besides, the Vincents told me, and every one in the hotel must see that something is wrong. Mr. Cohen does, I know.'

'Well, I can't help it; it is not my fault.'

'But, Ralph, you won't let her go like this?'

'What nonsense!' he exclaims. 'You had better leave this matter alone, Maggie. We know what is best for ourselves. The fact is, we are not suited to each other, and there's an end of it. Please don't

let us talk about it any more. What did you send for me for?'

'I sent for you for that,' I say. 'I wanted to try and set matters right. You are being very cruel to her; by-and-by you will find that you have been cruel to yourself too.'

'You must leave this matter to me,' he says. 'I have made up my mind about it, and really must know best. Besides, she seems to be very content. She wished me good-bye a quarter of an hour ago without the least regret.'

'It was all put on.'

'How do you know that?'

'I do know it; every one who has seen you together knows it. I think she is too good for you, Ralph,' I say, half indignantly.

'Thank you. Then there's nothing more to be said.'

'And is it all over?' I ask, feeling that I have done no good, but perhaps the contrary.

'Yes, it is all over. I would rather not talk of it any more. How is Molly?' But I cannot answer, I am so sorely disappointed. He waits for a moment, then he asks again, turning as he speaks a little way towards the door as if to go downstairs, 'How is Molly?'

Perhaps it is the excitement or the disappointment; I do not know, but I burst into tears and

exclaim, 'Oh, Ralph, she is going to die, and it breaks my heart.'

He comes back and looks at me, half in doubt, as if he wonders whether I know what I am saying. 'Die! What do you mean? Is she worse?'

'Yes. Not worse to-day, but she has been getting worse these last few weeks, and she is going to die.'

'How do you know?'

'I have known it since the day I went to Malaga, but no one else knows except the doctor and his brother. There is no hope—none—none. This is the first time I have spoken of it except with the doctor. It is this that makes me so anxious about you and May. I am so miserable; there is nothing more in this world for me, but I cannot bear to think of sorrow for others; and for May—that sweet May——'

He walks up and down, and says nothing; then he stops in front of me, and asks, 'Does May know?'

'About Molly? That you are here? She does not know either. I would not tell her about Molly for the world, poor child. I made the doctor promise to tell no one. It would be doing no good to tell people, and I could not bear them to look at her and be sorry, to know that they were sorry, and all that. I should only break down.'

'Why don't you try and get to England?'

'It is too late; I must go back alone.'

He walks up and down again for a few minutes, then he stops. There is something soft enough in his voice when he speaks. 'Are you quite sure, you poor thing; are you quite sure?'

'Yes, Ralph, quite.'

He looks at me, a long look with all the memories of years in it; it tells me more than any words could tell of what is in his heart.

'Maggie,' he says, and hesitates for a minute and looks at me again, while I know that we are both thinking of bygone days once more, of the broken fence, of the path through the copse, and the laurel bank at the end of the gate. 'What sorrow you have had,' he says gently: 'I can hardly believe that you are the merry little girl I romped with years ago.'

'Don't think of me,' I say; 'only tell me about May.'

He hesitates again. 'What do you want me to do?' he asks slowly.

'I want you to make it up, and not to quarrel any more, if you care for her; if you don't, then you are right to break it off, but not otherwise. Oh, dear Ralph, don't do it—don't play with your happiness so; it will never come again, perhaps.'

'I don't believe she cares,' he says.

'She does; she loves you dearly.'

'Did she tell you so?'

'Yes, she did,' I answer, for I know that May was not ashamed of loving him, till this wretched quarrel arose.

'I am sure I love her,' he says honestly. 'I never cared a straw for any other woman. I can't think how it is we make such fools of ourselves, but we always do;' then he begins to laugh, and he looks so manly as he speaks his words out frankly that I understand how it is he has subdued poor May so entirely. His conscience pricks him, I think, at the sound of his own laughter, for he asks me about Molly again.

'But don't tell May,' I say; 'it can do no good; it would only distress her. Don't let her know till the end comes. I should not like her to be sorry any longer than we can help: it is no use piling up the sorrow in the world.'

'No,' he says, 'it is no use. I won't tell her; it would only distress her, as you say. But I shan't see her again; I have said good-bye. I will write to her at Gibraltar.'

'Oh no, Ralph; make it up before she goes to-night.'

'I don't believe she cares much, or she wouldn't be so provoking.'

'She does,' I say eagerly. 'There has never been any one else in the world for her but you—she told me so; and Mrs. Vincent said that only a great love

satisfied, only happiness—and there will be none for her without you—would prevent her life from being tragic.'

'It shan't be tragic if I can help it,' he says. 'Dear child, I am as fond as possible of her. Why, she's as good as gold; it is only that she will contradict one,' he laughs, 'and be obstinate and provoking.'

'But you would not like a quiet, tame woman, Ralph: any man can win a woman who never thinks, who is never self-willed and obstinate.'

But before he can answer there is a knock. It is May, to wish me good-bye. I cry 'Come in,' and without any apology fly into the next room. I watch them for a moment through the half-open door.

She gets two steps into the room before she sees him. She is very pale, and it is evident that she has been crying. She wears her travelling dress, and carries her hat in her hand.

'I did not know you were here,' she says gently to Ralph; 'I came to say good-bye to Mrs. Keith. I didn't know you were here,' she repeats.

'May, I have been very unkind to you, and very unjust. Will you forgive me?' he says, going forward.

She looks at him in surprise. She did not expect this; she can hardly believe her ears. 'Unkind,

Ralph? no'—but she cannot tell the untruth—'Yes, Ralph dear, you have been unkind, but of course I forgive you,' she answers gently; she does not look as though she meant or expected to make it up.

'And won't you take me back? I know I have been a brute to you, but won't you make it up? we won't quarrel any more, dear.'

I go and stand by Molly's side; it would be mean to watch them longer.

She is silent for a minute, and then she cries out passionately, 'Oh, you can't care, Ralph; you can't love me at all,' and bursts into tears.

There is silence for a minute, but I know somehow that he has taken her in his arms and is kissing her tears away. I kneel down thankfully to rest my face on Molly's hand—my little sleeping Molly's hand.

'I do care,' he says; 'I care for you more than for anything else in the world. I wish I could make you understand at once and for ever, that, no matter how disagreeable I am, I love you more than anything else in the world, and that nothing will ever make me change in that.'

'You may be as disagreeable and—and as unkind too as you like, if that is only true. I want nothing else in the world.'

'You silly child! There, but I am not half good enough for you; Maggie told me that just now, and it's quite true.'

'It's not a bit true,' she laughs.

'Well, we won't begin to quarrel again,' he answers; 'and now is it all made up?'

'Yes, it's all made up!' she cries, with a ring of happiness in her voice that brings the tears to my eyes; 'it's all made up, only I can't believe it.'

'Then we'll call Maggie—Maggie!'

'Oh, Mrs. Keith, I believe you did it on purpose,' May says, as I come in; and she laughs again, then putting her arm round my neck, she begins to cry.

He looks at her, half puzzled and half ashamed, remembering how disagreeable he has been. 'A greater goose I never knew,' he says, but there is a little tremble in his voice.

'I don't care what you call me now,' she says, beginning to laugh again.

'Then I shall call you a dear child, for you are one. And now I shall go and pack up; I can't trust you out of my sight any more. But stay; there is José outside—he'll do it.' And he goes to the door. 'Here, José,' he says to the lazy old man half asleep at the end of the passage, 'go and pack up everything in my room, get my bill, and put all my luggage with the Señor Vincent's. There are only ten minutes, and so, perhaps,' for he suddenly remembers the country he is in, 'you will do me the great favour to put your worship's self into a hurry. Well, miss,' he says to May, 'are you ready? we

ought to be going.' He looks at her hand, which is on my shoulder; she follows the direction of his eyes.

'Where is my diamond ring?' she exclaims. 'Give it me back; I long for it so.'

'Your diamond ring?' he laughs.

'Yes, my diamond ring,' she cries. 'Oh, thief! where is my dear ring?'

He laughs again, and pulls it slowly out of his pocket. 'You threw it back at me,' he says.

'I know I did, but I never will again,' she says; and he puts it on, and she kisses it just as she kissed the place where it had been the day she showed me it was gone.

'We must go, I fear,' he says regretfully.

She clings to me, loth to say good-bye. 'My dear, my dear,' she whispers, 'I shall never forget you while I live. I should have died to-night, I think, but for this;' and with many loving words she leaves go at last. Ralph takes my hand and hesitates.

'Good-bye,' he says; 'we shall meet——' but he remembers and stops. 'I shall write to you,' he says simply, and wrings my hand. 'God bless you, dear.'

I can't bear to see them go, and yet follow them to the door.

He looks back for a minute. 'I shall marry her

out of hand,' he says, 'then I shall keep her in order properly.'

'Yes, do,' I answer.

'But perhaps I shall object to being married out of hand,' she laughs; 'and you won't be able to keep me in order, Ralph; I am sure you won't.'

'I'll try,' he says. 'I am afraid you'll be a handful; but never mind.'

And so they go downstairs together, laughing and chattering, this last night, just as they did the first night they came to see me. It is like the ending of a circle, as most things seem to be, not always at the time as this does, but in the after-days when we remember and look back.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MOLLY is worse; I can see that plainly. She does not talk much or laugh any more, but quietly sleeps her time away, while I sit still beside her and doze too.

The Vincents have been gone a week. Nellie Josephs and Mrs. Walters have been very kind to us, but to-morrow they too will be gone. The American came to finish his picture yesterday, and Mr. Josephs and his daughter, from sheer loneliness, asked if they might come and watch him paint. The sardine of course followed them. I thought the sound of their talking would drive me mad; it would if it had gone on much longer. I was so tired of seeing the group of beggars painted, so tired of all the talk about me, so tired of the abuse of this poor land. After all, the sun shines, and the orange trees are here, and the Moors have left compensation behind them for many things one has to undergo in the country for which they did so much. I have grown fond of the place, and the constant abuse of it frets and worries me.

'It is a strange thing,' Mr. Walters said, as he put the finishing touches to his picture, 'but if you were to turn everything out of Spain but the things that have been brought into it by foreigners, you would find nothing left but the beggars.'

'And the memory of the Inquisition,' said Mr. Josephs.

'The Spaniards built the cathedrals, did they not?' Mrs. Walters asked.

'The best ones are the mosques done up to order, and the others are imitated from the Italian,' the sardine informed her, triumphantly.

'Did you enjoy the pictures at Madrid, Mr. Walters?' Nellie asked. 'They must have compensated you for many things.'

'Well, I was disappointed. Velasquez was not bad as a portrait painter; still, I was disappointed. As for Murillo, I never want to see any more of him while I live. He has painted enough Madonnas with babies in their laps to set up every country in the world with a Christianity of its own. I am of opinion that, as a rule, the work of old masters is overrated.'

Oh, if they would only leave off talking and go away, I thought. I sat and listened to them till I was dazed with it and foolish, till I could have cried. It was not the sardine who worried me, or quiet little Nellie; it was Mr. Josephs, in black clothes, with his rather corpulent body, his air of prosperity,

his satisfied face, with the dark, short-cut whiskers and slightly bald head, and the big diamond badly set in yellow gold on his little finger. I can't tell why it was that he worried me so, but he did, and Mr. Walters too; I counted the minutes to the finishing of that picture. Even the little click of his wife's needle worried me. I wanted to be alone with my child—alone—alone; I must and will be alone.

Mr. Josephs and Nellie went downstairs at last, and Mr. Walters began talking to the sardine.

'I am very sorry to part so soon, Mr. Cohen,' he said. 'Meeting you and your friends here has been a privilege I shall remember for a long time. If you should visit our country, I hope we shall come across each other again: there are many things in which we sympathize.'

'Thank you. Pretty sure to go to America some day. Shall look you up. By the way, there was that little picture of yours; am sorry we couldn't agree about it, but I can't afford works of art. It's a nice little picture, quite worth thirty pounds, and I am glad you didn't take the twenty. I don't mean to give over ten pounds for anything at all for the next few years. It is a nice little thing, and you will get a good price for it at home.'

Mr. Walters went on with his work in silence for a few minutes. 'Well, I know it's nice,' he said

slowly. 'I am sorry it is not going to you. The money doesn't matter. I'm pretty lucky about selling, and there's a dealer who's ready to sweep off all I have not time to get rid of myself; but I should have liked to think that you hadn't missed it.'

'Yes, I am sorry,' the sardine said; 'but it does not do to let your feelings carry you away. Make a point of checking my feelings.'

Mr. Walters went on painting in silence again; when he looked up there was a twinkle in his eye.

'I'll tell you what, Mr. Cohen—I should be sorry for you not to have it. I couldn't have taken twenty pounds; it wouldn't have been fair to the picture, and I make a point of treating good honest work with consideration, no matter whether it is my own or another person's. But I have thought of a way in which we can tide over this difficulty with satisfaction to us both. If you'll accept it as a present from me I shall be proud, and you can hand over that ten pounds to my wife as a present to our baby at home. I shall like to think that you have the painting, and my wife, she will like to know that the baby has such a handsome present as ten pounds, and that will settle it comfortably all round.'

'All right,' he said, reluctantly. 'I saw the picture in the patio, so I'll carry it off. May as well settle up at once, and then it will be done with.' He pulled out a pocket-book, and handed a note to

Mr. Walters. 'Tell the baby to have a good time with it,' he said. 'I must go and look after the others now; they'll want a walk or something,' and the sardine went off, looking as if he were not in the best of humours.

'Well, that was a lesson for you and me, Mrs. Keith,' Mr. Walters said. 'If I had closed in with the transaction first offered, I should have been ten pounds better off. I ought to have remembered with whom I was dealing. There's a proverb in Malta, I've heard, to the effect that the Jew can't live there because the Maltee is too much for him, but it strikes me that it's about the only place in the world where he doesn't get the best of it.'

. . . . . .

This morning Mr. and Mrs. Walters went away. They lingered round Mr. Josephs to the last moment, hoping to be offered a passage in the *Flying Dutchman*, but the hope was vain. Mr. Josephs heard all their compliments, listened to all their longings, agreed that they were quite right to like journeying by sea better than by land; but the invitation went to the sardine, not to the artist. So Mr. and Mrs. Walters regretfully enough started by the rattling omnibus to Malaga. I watched them pass the corner of the street, and thought, as I saw the piled-up baggage, of all the little worries before them.

This afternoon Mr. Josephs, his daughter, and

the sardine ride to Malaga on the bony hacks they have ridden every day since they came. At Malaga the *Flying Dutchman* awaits them. Perhaps it will all come right for the sardine. I do not know; I cannot trouble more about any one save Molly, not even about the friend who has been so good to us.

. . . . . .

I have had so good a sleep that it has made me feel half strong again; and Molly too is better, but she shakes her head when I ask her to get up.

'I want to lie still, dear mummy,' she says. 'When is Mr. Cohen going to tell me about the king and the oranges?'

'I do not think he will be able to tell you about them, my darling. He is going away to-day, but I will tell you anything you like.'

'Dear mummy,' and she doses off again.

The sardine comes in to spend his last half-hour at Zahra with me. I pull myself together, and, reproaching myself for the apathy that has overtaken me lately, try hard to be bright and lively for this last little talk with him. To the sardine, I remember again, liveliness is the first of all virtues.

He has done his packing; he wears his travelling clothes, and they have the effect of making him look taller than ever. He is very confident and pleased.

'Things have improved lately,' he says. 'I think on the whole they are going pretty well. The Spanish

was an excellent move—gave us so many excuses for being together. She's a dear little thing. I really think she's coming on a bit.'

'Yes, I think she is too,' I say, and realise that there are few things left in the world that have power to please me so much as the thought that he will be happy.

'Very glad you think so. I believe you have put in a good word for me now and then. Something she said let it out. Very good of you.'

'It wasn't at all good.'

'Oh, yes, it was,' he contradicts. 'After all, I don't think I shall be a bad sort to her.' The sardine is always a little vain and satisfied when he sees his way to the prosperous side of things. 'She shall have everything she wants, do just as she likes—that is, as far as possible, you know. She's a nice little girl; just do for me all round.'

'I think Mr. Josephs likes you,' I say.

'Think he does. He's not a bad sort either.'

'Of course he knows what may happen if he takes an eligible young man for a voyage with his daughter on board.'

'Oh, he's all right,' the sardine says quickly.

'Have you said anything to him?'

'Yes, I have,' he answers, after a moment's hesitation. 'I couldn't go sailing under false colours, so I told him just how it was.'

'You didn't tell him that she had refused you?'

'Yes, I did;' he nods, but his colour comes. 'You see, I don't believe in caring for a woman round a corner. If you're ashamed of it, better leave it alone; if you are not, what is the good of making secrets, unless, of course, it's going to help? I asked the old fellow not to tell Nellie he knew, because girls have to be managed, and all that, and they don't like to think that their relatives are plotting and planning and approving before they are asked. But that's all. I am not ashamed of loving her; it's the best thing I ever did in my life.'

'I think she ought to be very proud of you,' I can't help saying.

'Oh, that's all nonsense. Perhaps she will be though,' he adds, on second thoughts. After all, he is only vain of himself in a manly fashion that does not offend one much. 'But I'm prouder of loving her than of anything else, and don't care who knows it, as far as knowing it doesn't mull matters. If she won't have me, that's my bad luck, and I must wait till I find some one else as good, or put up with some one else worse, and not make a fuss.'

'I think she will have you.'

'You can never be sure,' he says, some doubts suddenly overtaking him; 'you can never be sure of a woman. I thought I was getting along all right yesterday, so tried on a little bit of nonsense, and

got put back for my pains. However, I'll do my best. I told her all about the little place in Wales this morning. That seemed to fetch her a bit.'

'Have you got a place?' I ask.

'Oh yes. Jolly little place, with a queer little tower in which the bees swarm every summer, and sting you if you don't look out. It is ten miles from everything; lots of ground, flowers, grow our own cows——'

'But is it not very quiet for you, Mr. Cohen?'

'No; rather like it, for a bit. It's a fishing-box. There's a lake at the end of garden; but I never fish—too fiddling for my taste.'

'What is the good of the lake if you never fish?'

'Does for a morning dip. Then there are two or three boats; if we get a lot of people down we can go on the water all day.'

'It sounds very nice.'

'Do you like punting, Mrs. Keith?'

'I never did any. Is it very pleasant?'

'Very—excellent exercise—I mean to do some this year; have a punt on purpose. You shall come and stay with us if we're married, and we'll go mooning about all day long.'

'Yes, we will,' I answer doubtfully; and he goes on, pleased enough, as usual, to state his views.

'I like to see a punt—nice little woman at one end, white frock, straw hat, blue ribbon round it,

open book on her knees; big man at the other end, walking up and down like a lunatic, sticking his long pole in, pulling it up again, making the punt bound along like anything; cows in the meadows looking on with admiration. That's the programme. I wish you were coming back with us; I do indeed.'

'It's too soon.'

'You'll follow us up before long, though, I hope,' he answers.

'Yes, perhaps.'

'And don't give in. There's no use in giving in. She'll get better; she doesn't look well just now, I know, but she'll get better,' he says kindly. 'Don't be downhearted; I can't bear to think of you fretting and making yourself miserable.'

'Don't think of it, then,' I say, trying to laugh. 'I want to be brave; to be a credit to you——'

'All right,' he interrupts; 'you mustn't ever think of that,' for he knows what I mean. 'She's such a nice little chick,' he adds; 'can't I have a look at her, and say good-bye? I won't disturb her.'

He walks into the next room, and stands by the bedside silently looking at her; then he stoops and kisses her little hands. 'Do you think it will wake her?' he whispers, and I shake my head. She

opens her eyes, looks up at him with a smile, but she does not offer to move. He stoops and kisses her tenderly, and when he lifts his head there are tears in his eyes. I know what he is thinking, and what he has seen written in Molly's face. He follows me back into the sitting-room.

'I would give ten thousand pounds to save her,' he says. 'But cheer up—don't give in yet; there's never any knowing.' He hesitates for a few moments, as if he could not bring himself to take leave. 'Nellie's coming to say good-bye,' he says; 'you must think of us sometimes, and wish me good luck.'

'And good luck to her too, for it will be good luck to get you, dear Mr. Cohen,' I say, and so it will.

'Oh no,' he answers, shaking his head; 'but she shall have a good time if it all comes right—I'll take care of that. I say, can't you come down to the door and see us off? then we needn't say good-bye now,' he asks, as if anxious to put off saying the last word.

'Yes, I will.'

'That's right. I'll go and look after my traps. We shan't get another word together, but I'll drop you a line if things go all right. I wish we were not going to look out for the amiable relation, Mrs. Greenside, at Bordeaux. However, I shall have had

my innings before then, if I am ever to have any luck at all.'

Nellie Josephs looks fair and pretty in her riding-habit.

'I am going to see you start,' I tell her, 'so we will put off our good-bye.'

'Yes,' she answers, 'but I should like to see Molly.' She and Molly whisper and talk together, and when they have finished she puts her arms round my neck; 'dear Mrs. Keith, I shall long to see you again,' she says. 'You have been so good to me, I owe you more than you think.'

'What shall you say to him?' I ask.

She looks away from me, a little half-frightened smile hovers about her mouth, but for answer she only puts up her pretty hands to caress my untidy hair; and I wisely ask no more questions. We go down the dusty stairs, and wait beneath the palms while Mr. Josephs gives directions and lingers about, like the rich man, confident of having paid well for all he wants to be done, and determined that it shall be done or he'll know the reason why.

'Nellie,' he says, as if he wanted them out of the way, 'you and Cohen had better go on ahead; I'll soon overtake you.'

The sardine gives a business-like assent, helps Nellie into her saddle, and slips on to his own horse

in a second. He looks back at the street and over at the *café*. I know that he remembers the piano we have all mechanically listened to so often. He looks up at the hotel, which he will never forget, for much of his own history is bound up with it. He calls out to his future father-in-law, 'All right, you'll overtake us; here we go,' and wrings my hand. 'Keep up your courage; she'll get well, and when you come back we'll go punting in Wales,' are his last words to me. Nellie cries, 'Good-bye again, Mrs. Keith; kiss Molly once more for me,' and then they start. I shade my eyes with my hand and watch them. Farther and farther they go along the roadway, between the hedges of prickly pears and esparto grass and sugar-cane; their horses swerve apart, and then draw close together. They stop and look round; I go out into the road. I think they recognise me, for they wave their handkerchiefs. I wave mine back, and happily they cannot see the tears that are on my face. They go on quickly, the next moment a bend in the road and some rising ground have hidden them from sight. They are gone. Oh, good friend and brave heart that helped me and cheered me in my sore distress, my tender manly Jew, he is gone. I see the omnibus from Malaga coming round the curve, the straggling, bony horses trying to hurry forward. They have seen my friends since I saw them, and I look at

them longingly. A water-carrier draws up on the other side of the way, and arranges the green boughs about his water-cask; he does not know or care that they are gone. Oh, what a world it is, deaf here and blind there; but may the sunshine be beyond for you, my dears, and all the days be bright.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER XXIX.

DR. MURRAY told me to-day that it was a fortnight since the sardine and all of them went. I did not know. The days and nights slip and slip away, as the long miles slip away and cannot be counted when the weary traveller walks across the long moor, with only the darkness and the mist around, and no sign of light far on ahead to cheer and give him courage. These days that I have longed for—the days when we should be so thankful to be together and alone that we forget to-morrow—are going, and I can scarcely realize them, scarcely separate day from night, or the sunshine from the darkness.

I do not think she is worse; I cannot tell. She sleeps most of her time away—sleeps and dozes hour after hour, while the water-carriers, and the rattling omnibus, and the rumbling carriages drive by, and the bell rings out, clang,—clang,—clang.

Sometimes she is able to get up, and I dress her, with fingers sensitive enough still to the comfort of touching each thing that is hers. But when it is done, I have to call José, the old serving-man, to lift

her to the cushions in the next room; for I shall never carry her more—never more walk up and down the room with her, never again feel her head falling over my shoulder, or know that she is watching her own little face in the glass as we go to and fro. It is all over, over and finished,—there is only the end to wait for, and then for me there is the going home. I think sometimes of how my heart will stand still at the foot of the stairs, and my lagging feet half refuse to take me up to the nursery. The rocking-horse is in the nursery; I hear it sometimes when I doze and dream, and awake with a start to listen—swing, swing, swing, and then the little thud on the nursery floor.

It is strange, but the loneliness in this Spanish place—though I so longed for it—almost frightens me, now that it has come. I did not realize how complete it would be—the only woman in the house save Manuela, the only Englishwoman in Zahra, and in all Zahra there seem to be few women of any sort. Sometimes when I think of it it appals me, and yet why should it? I have Molly, and while she is here, what else matters? But it is like being in a whole world, or on a great sea alone, with a little child clasped in my arms. Is it only because I am ill and worn that I quake and tremble so?

No; there is another reason too. I am no weak

and superstitious woman, and I have tried to shake it off and to be brave, but something terrible—something I do not know what and cannot define—seems to be overtaking me. My heart sinks at the silence, and yet the sound of my own footsteps makes me start and listen and stand still, afraid to move even from one room into the other. Some awful shadow is dogging me, some darkness is before me, some horrible dread, besides that which has now been mine for weeks past, wraps me round and chills and stifles me. And thus from day I reach the night, afraid of what the darkness may bring; and from night the day, afraid of what the light may tell. Yet I dare not falter or break down, for my blessed one is with me still, and I must go on—

> 'Like one that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread;
> And, having once turned round, walks on,
> And turns no more his head.'

Oh, my God! what does it mean? Am I going mad, or what does it mean?

The sardine and Nellie Josephs are engaged. The news gives me a sense of rest and comfort, and so it should; to know that my friend is happy, and that the gentle little Jewess will be well cared for all her life, it is something to be thankful for indeed. He sent me a telegram. It came to-day,

when Molly and I had been sleeping; we were both refreshed and better, and, in spite of all my sorrow, the message made me laugh. This was it:

'*Nellie caved in yesterday. Very happy. Mrs. Greenside rampant. Miss Martin having bad time. Our love to you and Molly.*'

Oh, my dear sardine! But I could see you writing those words, and I cannot think of poor Mrs. Greenside's defeat without a little leaven of the old wickedness rising within me. This merry message from the outer world seemed to brighten up all the day for us. It was so good to think of their happiness. Ralph, too, has thought of us. I have his letter somewhere; it is here:

'My dear Maggie,—We are just leaving Gibraltar, and hope soon to be in England; when we arrive May will write to you. I have thought a good deal about you since our last talk together, and have hoped many times that you and Molly are better, and that your fears made you exaggerate her danger. If I could think that any words of mine would comfort or cheer you I would try to say them, but I know how impossible it is that anything I can do will help you. May is very well; I have not told her of Molly's condition, for she is very fond of you both, it would only make her unhappy, and, as you said, there is no reason to do that too soon.

She is very happy now—most unreasonably so, seeing that she is going to marry so great a bear as I have been to her. I shall never forget how much I owe to you; May is the only woman in the world I have desired to make my wife, and but for you we should now have been apart. I am not good at making protestations, but she shall be happy if I can make her so. It is probable, and indeed most likely, for reasons I need not enter upon now, that we shall be married immediately after we get back to England; but May will write and tell you all about this when it is finally settled.

'I shall look forward to seeing you again, and in spite of all you said, I cannot help hoping that you will bring Molly with you. Keep up your spirits, and, when you can, send a line to say how you are.

'Yours affectionately,

'R. B.'

* * * * *

Dr. Murray is very good to us, but he is more concerned about me than about Molly, and that is absurd. I am better; it is only this strange weakness and the drowsiness that prostrate me and deaden all my powers so that I cannot even feel as keenly as I did. I cannot read or think of work, or think even of Molly very much. It seems as if I have reached a certain point at which many

things finish—finish and are done with for ever. I try to look well when the doctor comes, but sometimes forget that he is here, the drowsiness masters me so, and I sit half stupefied till, with a gasp, I remember his presence and try to rouse myself. He is a strange, strong-willed man, with a power to rule others whether they will or not. Yesterday he would insist on writing to Alice Grey. I told him it would be useless, but he insisted, and so I let him have his way; it does not matter. I sit and wait for him in the morning, and so that he does not say the end will be to-day, I go on drowsily, dreamily waiting. The sense of being with her is sufficient, and we see and hear many things as we sit here, my Molly and I.

If only the bell would stop. The cries of the water-carriers, the sound of voices, the hurrying feet, the faint drone of the gipsy chant—all these are human sounds. But that bell ringing out as though it would awake the dead, what has that to do with the sky and the sea and the healthy thoughts of men? It rang out in ages past, perhaps, when the martyrs went by to the stake, and its iron tongue gave the executioners courage. . . . sometimes in my thoughts I enter the church, but it is always dark and close, and among the dusky figures I cannot breathe. Surely religion is not there? *That*

is outside, among the great mountains, or in the ever-restless sea, or the soft changing of the clouds above, or far away at home where the woods are green and the birds sing out in the fresh young spring.

Once long ago, in Kensington Gardens, I heard a thrush. It was in January, I think. Above, the trees were bare and brown; beneath, the sodden grass was scarcely green; far away through the palings I could see the carriages and the people passing, and all the signs of busy life. The little bird began to sing, and the tears came into my eyes as I stood listening, and putting my hands over my face I saw the world to which the thrush was singing. And I prayed with my whole heart that I might know that sweet world too, and be its citizen, so as to be worthy of all the happiness that was mine then. But the church with its darkness and incense would never awaken this longing, and yet as I lie here listening to the bell I can feel in my own heart all the weariness of every soul that steals in there to rest,—and to come out a little lulled and stupefied and yet no better. It is the song of a little thrush that speaks to one's heart, the memory of a beautiful life that makes one bow one's head in reverence and long to be worthy to live in the same world that held it. There is no beauty on earth like that of a beautiful life, no power so great and so far-reaching;

have not all the centuries borne witness to this since Christ was a babe at Bethlehem? . . . but I want to think of Molly; why do all these thoughts come into my head?

. . . . . .

To-day I finished my letters to Mrs. Marshall and nurse. There is nothing more to do except to wait on Molly.

I wonder why it is that in my ears so often lately I have heard my father's step coming up the lane at Minehead? My dear father! we used to be so happy together. I am always thinking now of the days when I was a little girl, and he holding my hand told me stories as we went along . . . all the fields are before my eyes—the fields in which we gathered flowers. I used to carry home the buttercups and meadowsweet in my apron. I wish I had taken Molly to Minehead once; she will never see it now. As if it were but yesterday, I can see the huntsmen come across the hill, and feel my heart beat quick with fright as they ride on to Minehead; I used to sit in dread and terror for the poor red deer, praying that they might escape. . . . All down our copse the raspberries grew wild. I can almost fancy that my fingers touch the soft red fruit beneath the straggling boughs. If Molly had only seen it once; she'll never see it now . . . I will sit by her and tell her about the huntsmen, and the raspberries in

the summer-time, and the foxglove—do you remember how the foxglove drooped and died?—poor foxglove, that had reared its head so proudly; and how the bell heather came looking out from all the chinks and crannies? . . . I never think of Ralph and May making up their foolish quarrel in this room the night they went away but my thoughts go back to the copse beyond our field, and a walk we had, Arthur and I, just half a year before we married. The schoolmaster's wife was angry that he had not been to see her. . . . but I forget how it was—only I know that by a word I had vexed him, and waited in silence, half afraid and breathless, till he turned round and all my fears vanished when I saw his face. What a happy night it was! I can hear the rustle of the leaves overhead as we walk through the copse again, and the briars catch my dress as we pass by. I feel them sometimes in these hours when the terror is on me, holding me back as though they longed to keep me in that sweet world that forever is buried in the long, long years ago.

And still the days go by, I do not know how many, for I can keep no count. It is the twilight before the night falls, and one does not think of the minutes. Time measures out no more the things that shall be done and left undone, the things one shall begin or finish.

'Mummy dear,' Molly says, 'I wish I could have one of those oranges on the trees downstairs. I do so long for one.'

'Then you shall have one, my darling,' I say; 'I will go down to the patio and pick one for you,' and creep towards the door. I wait a minute or two to rest, as if in a dream I hear the voices in the street without, then I steal out towards the stairs. Oh, but there are so many cold, white stairs. . . . I cannot go any farther, the ceiling above my head is so high,—and the stairs lead to a great depth—and they are no longer separate,—I am falling—falling—falling. Oh, Molly—Molly——

. . . . . .

'Yes, doctor, oh yes, I am better; I am quite well. Do not think of me; it is Molly who is ill. Where is she? I heard the rocking-horse just now.'

'Mrs. Keith, do you know me?'

'Yes, of course I know you. You are Dr. Murray, and Dr. George is gone back to England.'

'Do you know where you are?'

'Yes; I am here by the window. That bell, doctor; oh, that bell. Molly is asleep, but I want to look at her. There is a cold wind at my throat.'

'You were choking, and I undid your dress,' he answers; as I hear him my shattered senses gather themselves together; I look up at him and am afraid.

'Do you know how ill you are?' he asks. 'Do you know what is the matter?'

'Oh yes, doctor; I have known since the day I went to Malaga.'

'You must have known long before that,' he answers; 'you must have suffered terribly.'

'I knew I was ill, but I did not suspect what it was for a long time—not till after Christmas.'

'But why didn't you speak to my brother?'

'I could not—I can't tell why, but I could not.'

'But for your child's sake you should have done so.'

'It was for her sake that I was silent. I thought I was ill because she was ill, and I bore it. I did not mind that sort of pain. I thought I should get well in time, and then—and then I suspected and dreaded——' I pause and gasp.

'Well?'

'One day I went to Malaga; in the hall of the hotel I saw some luggage, and on it the name of a great doctor, and to him I found sudden courage to speak. He told me what was the matter, that it was too late to do anything, and that I could not live——'

'Poor soul,' he says, and I go on, still speaking under my breath.

'Afterwards I went to Dr. George—that same hour—it was then he told me that Molly would die,

but I did not care so much any more. I could not have borne to see her die and know that I must live. Now, when she is gone I may live long enough to creep home, and that is all that I desire. I shall be so glad to rest.'

He gets up and stands by the window. Why does he not speak? Has he nothing to say? He comes back suddenly, and sits down facing me.

'You should have told me,' he says.

'What good would it have done? When the child is gone——'

He puts his hand on the arm of my chair, he looks me through and through, and then turns away.

'You are a brave woman,' he says slowly, after a pause, 'and it is better that you should know the truth, for there may be things you have to do and arrange. I do not think you will live to see your child die.'

'Not live!'

'No,' he answers, sadly but firmly; 'you will not live for that.'

'Not live!' I cry. 'I will—*I will.*'

'I fear you cannot,' he says gently, but there is a certainty in his voice, that goes to my heart like a stab.

'I cannot die,' I gasp, holding on to the chair—'I cannot. Die and leave Molly! no—no—no. I am stronger than you think.'

Oh, have all the flames with which they burnt the martyrs blazed into life again to burn me? My heart withers up with agony, and I cannot speak.

He sits and watches me, till once again I find a voice. 'Doctor, doctor,' I cry, 'how long have I? I am not dying—I am not dying?'

The words seemed to be dragged from him as he answers, 'You are indeed.'

'Dying—dying now?'

'You may live some days—not many I think,—I cannot tell. I am cruel to tell you,' he says, with a shudder, 'but it is a duty, and it is due to your courage.'

His voice is gentle enough, and yet I feel that while he speaks and while he longs to be kind to me, he does not understand the torture that is in my heart; he cannot, he will never understand any woman's heart—never; kind and just, yes, but understand? never;—and oh the bitter loneliness and helplessness for me. And yet I cry out to him—

'Oh, doctor, help me, help me!'

'Let me telegraph to Mrs. Grey,' he says. 'She will have had my letter; let me telegraph and ask her to come.'

'Oh yes, telegraph—pray,' I cry, catching at even that straw, and swift I think of May and Ralph, and of the sardine and Nellie; but they could not come—besides, I do not think they are in England yet,

for they were going home by roundabout ways. 'Telegraph at once,' I say; 'tell her that I am dying, and beseech her to come; and, doctor, tell me this—are you sure that Molly will die?'

He gives for answer just one word, 'Yes'; it is a certain one, but again I ask—

'You are quite sure?' and again he answers—

'I am quite sure.'

'And can nothing be done to keep me alive till she goes?' I ask entreatingly.

'It is too late,' he says gently. 'I am cruel to tell you so, but I know you have courage and wish to know the truth.'

Then at length the tears come, and I sit and sob. Oh, if Molly would die; oh, if death would come and take her. . . . I can stay here no longer. Let me go to her. . . . She is sleeping, but I will not disturb her; I will kneel here, and—no, but I cannot. Lift me up beside her—lift me up and let me be. Oh, Molly, my own, my own, if death would but come to you, my sweet! Oh to see you die! For there is none to leave you to; none can even get tidings and be here in time. Oh to see you die, Molly—oh to see you die! But you are better; you breathe softly and sleep soundly, and I am longing to see you die.

He has gone for a little while, and I am alone with her, alone with this dread agony. Molly, Molly,

am I to leave you, to let pain conquer me;—I who would bear any torture for your sake and think it sweet; I to let my hands fall helpless while they might still help you? It cannot be—but, oh to see you die, Molly—oh to see you die!

. . . . . .

'Is that an answer from Alice Grey, doctor?' for he comes with a telegram in his hand.

'Yes, here is one,' he answers, 'also a letter which was waiting for you downstairs.'

'Open it—open and see;' and slowly he opens it, while it flashes through my mind that perhaps she is sorry and is coming. Has she not little children of her own?

'*So very, very grieved. Cannot possibly come.*'

I knew, I knew. There is no one in the world who can come. . . .

'Shall I open the letter?' he asks.

'Yes,' I say; 'open it.'

He looks at it again. 'Why, it is for Molly,' he says; and Molly, hearing her name, turns round.

'It's May,' she says; 'she has written to tell me about the dolls. Please read it, dear mother.'

'I cannot, darling; I cannot.'

'Oh, mummy, I do so want to hear about the dolls,' she says beseechingly.

'Shall I read it, Mrs. Keith?' Dr. Murray asks.

'I nod my head, and he begins; but there is a

ring of happiness in the first words that sets me sobbing, and he stops. It is like a message from another world; like the sound of soft music played to one who is on the rack. I cannot bear it. Oh, selfish and coward that I am, for I can bear nothing! Am I not glad that she is happy, poor May? But how can I lie still and listen to the sound of your laughter when I am clasping my hands and praying that Molly may die?

'Shall I put it by for another time?' the doctor asks; but I catch Molly's longing face.

'No, no; go on. I want to hear about her,' I answer; and so he begins again and reads, while Molly watches him eagerly, and looks pleased, and I too for a moment lose sight of all else while I listen to that happy letter:

'My sweet little Molly,—I shall write to you to-day, and not to mother; next time I shall write to mother, and not to you. And the reason I write to you now is, that I don't feel quite old enough to write to mother, for I have grown younger, dear Molly, and am not a bit older than you to-day, and my heart is like a feather. Oh, little Molly, I wish I were with you, or rather I wish that you were here and quite, quite well. We would dance all round and round the room; we should not fall, we should not break anything, we should not disturb

dear mother if she were painting, and yet we would go round and round like two fairies a little bit crazy. I wonder how you are, my dear, and if you forget me, and if you have plenty of flowers, and if the church bell is ringing, and if the piano is going?—but I don't believe it ever stops. Only think, little Molly, I saw some gipsies at Gibraltar; I do not know if they were real gipsies, but there was a little brown-eyed girl, just about as big as you; she had a red handkerchief on her head and a necklace of gold coins round her throat, and she played her castanets and danced. She made me think of Zahra, and of you and mother, and I blew you both some kisses. Did they come? They were big kisses and ought to have known their way about, just as big people do.

'But I have not told you yet why I am so happy; I am telling it now to you and mother just as if I were sitting by her nursing you and looking out at the beggars over the way. Well, Molly, little Molly, I am going to be married in six days' time; only think of that. And whom do you think I am going to marry, and who do you think is going to marry me? Ralph! Ralph, with the soft brown eyes, which, I think now, he stole from the gipsies. Ralph, who used to nurse you and pet you, and who knew dear mother when she was a little girl, before she had any little Molly of her own. He and

I are going to be married, just as your dear father and mother were married long ago. We shall be so happy together, for we love each other dearly; and we shall be called Mr. and Mrs. Ralph, and walk about arm-in-arm, and I shall wear a wedding-ring. That is why I am so happy, dear Molly, for I know that there is no one in the world like him, and I love him dearly, more even than you love mother, and I am going to be with him all the days of my life. You must think of me on Wednesday, just at about eleven o'clock, when I shall be dressed in a long white satin gown, and wear a wreath of flowers, like the grandest doll of all upstairs. I shall drive away in a carriage like Cinderella to the ball, and when I come back Ralph will be with me, and we shall have been married; then we shall sit down in front of a large white cake, and feel like king and queen. Don't you think it is like a fairy story? I do, only it is much nicer and truer, and it will never come to an end while we live; for being always with any one you love very very much is like living inside a fairy story that never leaves off, and that's why it is better.

'The dolls' house is upstairs on the top of the cupboard still, the dolls are quite well and all of them longing for you. Kiss your mother for me, little Molly, and tell her to kiss you. And now good-bye; get well and bring the swallows here.

All the spring flowers are out, the woods are green, the thrushes are singing, and the skylarks flying high; they are all looking out for Molly and mother and the swallows. Good-bye once more, little Molly.

'MAY.'

On Wednesday? But that is to-day. Molly, they are being married to-day—to-day; thank Heaven for that. If he only lets himself love her enough, how happy they will be. Ah, poor May, how thankful I am that your happiness has not slipped by and left you behind. Molly, let us stop and forget all things besides for a little while, for this is May's wedding day. Turn to me, my sweet; oh, my dear, how I love you.

. . . . . .

Another long night, and I am living still; another morning has come, and life is here; the pain is going, and Molly is asleep—an uneasy, restless sleep, but there is a smile on her face, as though she dreamt of green fields and merry playmates. . . . Hark! it is so strange, but I am not dreaming now, and I can hear him coming down the lane again; . . . there beyond is the buttercup field, and the garden, a trim garden where Ralph and I played together when we were children. . . . It is only half a mile to the inn; Arthur gave the landlady a little picture once, in memory of all the happy days;

she had it framed in a heavy black frame, and it hangs in her best room. Has he gone? He is by the sea, painting in the corner by the rocks. Oh, come back! come back! you do not know.

. . . . . .

The doctor again. It seems as if he is always here, and yet there is some illness raging at Malaga. Why does he come so often to us? He sits down by my bedside, and for a minute looks at me in silence. There is a strange expression on his face. As if with some dim presentiment of what is coming, my heart throbs with fear, for in his voice there is something kind and yet unflinching. He looks across at Molly, and asks in a low tone if she is sleeping. I nod an affirmative; he is silent for a whole minute perhaps before he speaks, and when he does he looks half afraid and his words come slowly.

'Mrs. Keith,'—he says, 'do you think—you could let Molly go?'

'Go! Go where?'

'Into the next room. I would see that it was made ready myself, and Manuela will be kind to her, I will speak to her——'

'I cannot;' my heart stands still, and a cold wind sweeps over my face.

'I am afraid it must be,' he says gently. 'You must nerve yourself to give her up. It will be best for her.'

I shake my head; my lips tremble and will not speak. I stretch out my hand to touch her and protect her—my hand that has hardly strength even to clasp Molly.

'Why?' I gasp at last. 'I can't, I can't, and I am better. I have suffered no pain since yesterday.'

'It is the weakness of—the end,' he says slowly. 'You would not like your child to see you die? Poor little thing, it would be too terrible.'

'Oh, what shall I do?' I gasp.

'Let her go,' he says; 'remember she will be left behind even if you do not give her up now. Philip will come in often, and I will—there is so much sickness just now, or I would come oftener—but I have spoken to Manuela, and she will do her best——'

'How long shall I live?' I whisper, but even while I speak a dull, sinking pain steals over me. I can hardly breathe, and I know that the parting is near.

'I do not know; it may be eight-and-forty hours,' he answers, 'it may be twenty-four, or—less. But be brave, do what is best for your child and let her go. She shall have every kindness. She will not miss you after the first day or two, and Manuela is a good-natured woman——'

'I cannot do it,' I cry in my bitter agony.

'You must,' he entreats, 'for her sake. I have

left it to the last; the little room next to this was made ready yesterday——'

'I cannot do it,' I cry again; 'I will not.'

'You would not die beside her? you cannot take her with you;—you will have to leave her. Besides, it is doing her harm to be here. I will come back in an hour; be brave——'

'Is there no hope that she will live, doctor?' and suddenly there flashes on me the meaning of the terror that has been dogging me. 'Must I leave her in any case? Is there no hope?'

'None,' he answers solemnly. 'There is *no* hope; perhaps it comforts you now to know that there is none.'

With a shudder I look round at the familiar objects, and hurriedly at one corner of the room. For one second I look down at Molly's face, then with a wild throb of agony and despair I shrink and turn away, for I know the awful thought that is taking possession of my soul.

'She *must* die?' I ask calmly, and he nods for answer. I lift my head, and meet his eyes fearingly, dreading lest he should divine the awful thing that is in my mind. 'Be merciful to me,' I whisper, 'and let me keep her this one day and night more.'

'It is cruel——'

'No, no,' I go on, putting up my hand to keep him, for he has risen to go. 'Let me have her this

one day and night. She will not know if I die in the night—they can lift her away. In the morning, if I live I will submit.'

He is relenting. 'You will really give her up in the morning?'

'Yes; in the morning she shall go into the next room, and you and Manuela and Philip shall all be there,' I say bitterly. He is silent, and I go on eagerly. 'I will lie so still beside her all day; in the morning I may be so weak that I may not know when she goes.'

He hesitates; and at last gives way. 'Very well, it shall be so,' he says. 'I will come again in the evening. I cannot well come before.' He is going out of the door, but I call him back.

'Tell me again that she must die,' I beseech—'tell me again that she *must* die;' and he answers me pityingly.

'She must die,' he says gently. 'She will not miss you long.'

He goes, and I dare not move, or, above all things, look at Molly, for I know well what it is that I am going to do. Let that cruel woman tend her, let strange hands smooth her pillow, and cold hearts watch her die? Oh no,—no,—no, I cannot, and it shall not be, for to-night, when they leave us alone, I will *kill* her.

CHAPTER XXX.

Now I understand . . . But it shall be so. She shall never lie with the fever burning on her face, and the light shining from her eyes, and call for mother who had gone to rest, and left her to die alone; or to die while Manuela looked on, and cold eyes wondered when she would be gone. She shall never toss and gasp, while the bell opposite rings out, and the water-carriers go by, but none come near her, none near Molly—alone—alone, and calling for mother, for mother, who could not bear her pain and died; mother, whose love was not strong enough to master her weakness, and so she went, and had not courage to take her little one with her. . . . It shall never be, it shall never be; you shall die in mother's arms, my sweet—in mother's arms that love you, with your face against hers. Yes, to-night, when they leave us alone, I will kill you, I will kill you; oh, my dear, I love you enough even for that. . . . That was why I brought it. Something has made me treasure it, and now I understand—now I know why my hands trembled as I

took the bottle out of the cupboard that day when I packed the things for nurse. It was there waiting to come with us; it is in that leather case. It is waiting—O God, to-night I am going to kill her—to kill my child, my little child.

. . . . . .

They will bury us at Malaga. We shall be together there; we shall never be separated now. I know where it is—far up on the hill, there are orange trees and lemon trees and drooping acacia trees, and we shall lie among them all. . . . Oh, how cold it is; I am shivering, and yet the room is full of sunshine . . . but the sunshine is terrible; it seems to fill the room, and to touch everything save me. Is it because I am going to kill Molly? . . . come nearer to me, darling . . . are you afraid of me? Do you think I shall live through to-day, doctor? But I must not ask him, or he'll take Molly away. He didn't hear me, for he is gone. . . . Hark! There is something coming—a noise in the street coming nearer and nearer, an odd, rumbling sound. How foolish I am; it is only the Malaga omnibus. The horses are thin, and so oddly harnessed, and there are little round bells that jingle on them. Do you remember how it came shambling along the road the day the sardine and Nellie went away, and the water-carrier, how he stood on the other side of the way, and did not know that they

had gone?—so strange it is, the things that people do not know. They were cantering along looking at each other, half doubting, half ashamed. . . . I remember how it was when Arthur came to Minehead: how one day when the hounds were out, some friends gave us a mount. We forgot all about the red deer, and went off along the country lanes to loiter and to talk, yet when we were alone we half feared to speak, and patted our horses' necks and looked hurriedly behind and curiously ahead, till at last we drew a little closer and found words to say. . . . . .

Dear, it is all a sad mistake; we know so little about things. It is only now that I am beginning to understand . . . all in circles, round and round, higher and higher, one but just touching the other; so lightly, it is only at our keenest that we know . . . round and round, . . . I am getting back now to the beginning and to Minehead . . . to the fields and the huntsmen and the deer . . . that is why I saw my father's face the other day. . . . I am getting back to Minehead, and the ends will meet to-night . . . I see it now, and am not afraid; one is finished, and another begins, there is no retreating, no going back; the ends meet, and all is changed, all is ended and yet goes on—goes on, and is ended again . . . one after another, a strange wild whirl, as we get nearer and nearer to the centre from which

all things will be before our eyes, . . . calmer and stiller out there where the circles go slower, where life is less keen, and dies and dies away; life that is not strong enough to bear the higher step, and must perforce go lower . . . Life—life that is keen and growing stronger and stronger as each one ends, or weaker and weaker, stretching away into the dimness, where it is lost—lost and forgotten, . . . lost . . . all that made it separate . . . choose, we must choose whether it shall be life or death, life or death . . . before we are swept on and on . . . from each circle in turn we see but a few things, not many, just a few, and some symbols of things that have been or are yet to come . . . higher and higher; oh, but reach it, the keener life and the clearer understanding. . . . Could love but avail . . . were that but strong enough to carry me over the great tide—over the great tide with Molly, with my baby Molly, to lay her down gently in the sweet light beyond. . . . Molly . . . Molly, but I am going to kill Molly; she will not be in this strange darkness long . . . to-night, when they leave us alone—I must not say it even in a whisper . . . I am going to kill her, my love, my sweet . . . yes, to kill her—kill Molly. . . . I hear my father's step again; he is coming along the green lanes to meet me. How sorry he will be when he knows! See! he stops, and looks over the hedges . . . it is all the same, it is

all just as it used to be; even the gate is broken still . . . there is a walk round the cliff, among the brake and briar; how lovely it is, and oh, how green it is. I knew I should see it once again . . . Ah, thank Heaven for this . . . It was such a cold morning when Ralph went away, and I climbed up the fence; it is so odd to think of it now, but I see it all again as I get back. . . .

You will be good to her, Ralph? I know how it is, dear—I know quite well. You cannot make your whole life turn on a woman's love—you do not choose; you would despise yourself. But she—but May! it is her whole life that she stakes, for though many things are in her world, and many longings and ideals, yet they will all go if he goes, they are all staked—he is the light by which she may see her way to good deeds and noble things; but if the light goes, ah, poor May, where will she grope to in the darkness? . . . He is coming up the lane again; he does not know that it is too soon,—there is no one over the hedge, dear father, why do you stop? it is the water-carrier, staying to pick some green boughs to deck his little barrels—it is only the water-carrier, dear father. . . . I think my mother knows that I am coming, and is glad . . . it is so many years since she went, it has been a long, long parting, and I can scarce remember her, but now we shall never be parted more, for to-night—to-night—mother—

mother, I am going to kill her, to kill my own little baby . . . oh, dear mother, but I must; I cannot leave her, you must not look at me so—I will bring her in my arms to you—you have never seen her, mother. I *must* do it—I must. . . . Give me some water. Why do all the water-carriers go by? they do not know, they cannot know—oh, dear mother, I must—mother dear, I must; I cannot leave her. . . . Molly dear, let me whisper—come closer; you are not afraid? it is because I love you, sweet—because I love you so . . .I will take you with me in my arms; you are not afraid?

. . . . . .

Molly opens her eyes for a moment. 'Mother,' she says, and sleeps again. Is it you, doctor? Oh no; it is Manuela. She comes to the bedside, and looks across at Molly with a smile and an odd calculating expression on her face.

'She won't be long now,' she says. 'I dare say it will be a relief to you,' she adds.

'Yes,' I say—'oh yes, it will be a great relief.'

She stands by the window and looks out. Suddenly she goes into the balcony and calls, 'Pedro! Pedro!' and some one beneath answers, 'Si, si, señora!' she says a great deal in Spanish, and laughs, and is amused.

I do not know what she says, except that it is something about the Dos de Mayo,—it is the name

of the little posada where the omnibus stops,—and about the gipsies, I understand when she says they will be tired. They are coming from the valley of the Darro. The Darro; that is the river that runs through Granada. Are the gipsies coming—coming just when Molly dies?

The talk at the window ceases, and I call to her—

'Manuela! Manuela!' as she had called to Pedro; and she answers just as he did.

'Si, si, señora!'

'Will you bring me a box in the corner—a black leather one; it is in the corner, the little one, and the key is on the table there.' She looks at me and hesitates; she cannot suspect! She sees it at last.

'Is it this one?' she asks.

As she lifts it she touches something, and a glass falls with a crash; the sound goes through me, everything in the room seems to hear it. Molly awakes and comes closer.

'Poor dear mummy, are you better, dear?' she asks.

Don't speak to me, Molly, Molly—don't speak to me, for this is worse than death—worse than death. —I open it at last, . . . my fingers touch the olive-wood case of the bottle . . . it is under my pillow . . . oh, it is true—true—true; to-night I am going to kill her; it is all true—true—true.

'Take it away,' I gasp. As she carries the box away she looks in it and thinks I do not see her. . . . Let her. It is only a few hours too soon; to-morrow she may open all the drawers and turn out all that we possess; the large dark hands on our white clothes will not matter. We shall have a smile on our lips as we lie still; . . . for to-night, when they leave us alone, I will kill her—kill Molly. —There is a knock at the door. 'Manuela, oh, Manuela, who is it?' It frightens and scares me. I think of the knock that comes to a prisoner's cell on his last morning of life; of the Jews when they were burnt in this sad land, and were fetched and clothed with pictures of the flames that were soon to consume them. . . . It is only a letter. No; it is a telegram. Is some one coming to Molly—some one coming to save her?

'Give it to me, Manuela,' I cry, but I can hardly clutch it. I pull it open. The lines are dim; I cannot see. 'Hold me up, and bring a light; it is so dark.'

'A light, and the sun shining! It is the darkness of your eyes, señora, and not of the sky.'

She holds me up, and gradually I fix my eyes upon it.

'*Helen Josephs and F. Cohen. Just home. Thinking of you. May Vincent, Ralph Bicknell married. Love to you and Molly.*'

Did some dim knowledge that we were setting out on our strange journey float to them that they should telegraph, or was it only my good friend, kind and thoughtful to the last? He will hear soon. Dr. Murray will tell them all. . . . It is the end of the story, the last scene in the play—this—this—is the end: two are married, two are waiting to marry, and two are waiting to die. Suddenly that wild bell rings out; it knows! it knows! ring the curtain down.

. . . . . .

There is a noise outside, some one enters the next room and puts down something heavy. It is the room where they are going to put Molly. What are they taking there? There is a knock. 'Come in.'—They have not come for her yet!—she shall not go! she shall not!—Oh, it is Philip. 'Why have you come? has the doctor sent you?' I stretch out my hand and clasp Molly. He brings in a tall white lily, holding it a little way off from him.

'The señor said I was to give you this, señora,' he says kindly; the rough old man looks sorry and half afraid.

'Put it there—there in the tall vase, Philip—there on the table where it can face me.'

'The little one, is she better?' he asks; I shake my head, and he goes on, 'I have put a little bedstead, such as little ones sleep in, for her in the next

room, señora. It was in our house, but we never knew where it came from or who had slept in it, and to-day the señor told me to bring it over and put it there, for she will not be able to fall out of it when she is alone.'

They are considering already how they may leave her alone. If they did but know, if they did but know! but they would take her away, and shrink from me with horror and say I was a murderess—a murderess, because I was not cowardly enough to steal away into the silence alone, and leave my child to toss and call for the mother who had deserted her. Oh, what strange things go by the name of crimes! what false things are called courage! I knew a mother once who could not see her child die, and let a stranger watch by her—her love was not strong enough to carry her through that agony; and once a girl I loved stole away, though I was sick and ill. She would not take leave of me because she could not bear the pain of parting, and I waited and longed to see my friend again, and have never seen her since. Oh, brave hearts, that love and bear, do not say that I have no courage when I quench the life in my sweet one's eyes to-night. I cannot leave her here alone; I am not cold or cruel enough for that. . . . But Philip is there still, and the tall white lily is on the table.

'It is so sweet, and oh, so white. It is very lovely.'

He stands watching it, and I look at him, the big rough man in the blue blouse. He is tender, too, in some ways, and looks at the lily as though it were a thing that he had loved.

'Ah, señora, wait till the summer,' he says, 'when there are pink Jupiters and tall tuberoses, and sweet-scented Don Pedros, and the garden is all a mass of tangled colour.'

'I shall not be here in the summer; I shall never see them, for I am going to die.'

He shudders as he listens. 'Do not talk of death, señora,' he says. 'We most of us live many years, and when dying comes, after all, it takes up so little time it is not worth considering much.'

'No, no, it is not worth considering,' I say gratefully, and turn and sigh.

'You will hear the gipsies come to-night, señora,' Philip says as he goes to the door; 'they are to have a merrymaking at the Dos de Mayo, and to-morrow they are going back to Granada.'

'Are you going to the merrymaking, Philip?'

'Si, si, señora. I shall look on while they dance, and Pedro, and Carlos, and Manuela, all of them will be there.'

He goes, and I look up at the lily. Dr. George

used to send me flowers every day, but never before has his brother sent me even one. Perhaps he will let me keep her.

. . . . .

Molly is looking at me. She is better; we are both better. Oh, Molly, if after all we might yet get well.

'Mummy dear, are you awake?' she whispers.

'Yes, darling, I am awake.'

She puts her hands into mine. 'Tell me a story, dear mummy,' she says, just as she did on board ship; 'tell me about the white rabbit.

And this last time on earth I begin—

'"*Once upon a time there was a white rabbit, and he lived down a hole in a wood at the foot of the snow mountains. Close by the bridge there was a palace*——" Oh, Molly, Molly, I can't; my baby—my dickie-bird—my little one—my sweet.' I break down and cry wildly, 'I can't—I can't—I can't.' Oh, is there no mother in all the world who will come to me and take my little one in her arms, or watch by her while she dies?

'Mother dear, mother dear,' Molly cries in alarm, and stretches out her hands again.

'I can't go on; I shall die—I shall die——'

'Oh no, mother; dear, dear mother,' she says, 'take me in your arms and put your head down, there—poor—poor mummy;' and so we are still, she

closes her eyes again and sleeps while my sad tears fall over her.

There is the piano in the *café* opposite, they are playing the waltz, how plainly I can hear it; it seems as if the sounds hurried over and went past the window and on and on . . . perhaps they meet the sea-breeze and die away as they go out towards the ships. Molly, how strange it is to be here in the Spanish land, dying! Jack—but I cannot think of him or of your father; we seem to have journeyed away from them, we are nearer to Minehead—here in the Spanish land the two ends meet. . . . I lie so still while Molly sleeps, and think all things over. It will be a good thing to rest . . . . I am thankful to go, and thankful that my little one is going with me. It has not been a bad world, and there was no sorrow in it for me till Arthur died. All my happiness went down to the sea with him and vanished, it has only been a sad make-believe since. . . . How glad I am that they were married yesterday! I think he was half ashamed at playing lover, and so they had their foolish quarrels; but he would be ashamed still more now at not being good and true to her. Perhaps they are in the country, taking long walks over the green hills and stretching moors, or looking for spring flowers in the hedgerows . . . they do not talk much, for they want to think; they look at each other now and then, half wondering

half doubting, whether it be true that they are together at last. . . .

. . . . .

Oh, but it sends a wild throb through me, for to-night *we* shall be married once more . . . once more, and Death shall be the high priest, and Life shall give me away . . . not for a few years, as Ralph and May were given to each other yesterday, but for ever, for time cannot undo the knot that death has tied . . . it seems a foolish thing, the little union here, when I think of that long one through eternity.

The day is nearly gone, it is almost dark, but they have forgotten to bring the lamp; the piano is going opposite, the beggars have left the church door, the water-carriers are going home—there are no thirsty souls in the dark . . . sleep . . . oh, that you might die while you sleep . . . oh, Molly, if you might die—die before the night comes. . . . She breathes quickly—oh, that she might die, that she might die . . .

'Yes, doctor, I am much better; it is only that I am giddy and the things swim, so that I do not see. I am much better. . . . What is that light? They have brought in the lamp at last, doctor; what time is it?'

'It is nearly seven.' He goes round to Molly and looks at her. 'She is better,' he says—'she is better than she was yesterday.' The words send a wild terror through me—words that once would have been sweetest music.

'And I, am I better? I feel stronger and well—nearly well; I have had no pain; tell me if I am better too.' He does not speak. 'If I am better she need not go, need she? *Must* she go to-morrow, must she go? May I not keep her one day longer? You need not take her if I am going to live?'

'My poor soul,' he says, 'go to sleep and think no more. I do not know if you will be here in the morning; it is not likely that you will be here many hours. Perhaps your child may mercifully go soon——'

'But you said she was better.'

'It does not mean anything.'

'And she must die; she can never get well? Tell me that again; it comforts me.'

'She must die,' he says, 'if it comforts you to hear it again. She *must* die—no human power can save her.' He looks at her again, and then returns to me. 'I do not think I can come back to-night,' he says; 'there is a very urgent case that needs me—and I can do no good here.'

'No, no good,' I answer.

'Manuela will come and sit here—I will tell her, and in the morning——' But he sees me shudder, and stops and says good-bye.

'Good-bye,' I say; 'and oh, I did not thank you for the lily. See, it is there where I can look at it.'

'You must not thank me,' he answers: 'it was my brother's. He planted those lilies, and told me to send you the first one.'

Ah, dear Dr. George, if he were only here, then I should not be afraid; I could trust Molly to him—my good, kind friend. He remembered me, yet he has hardly been in my thoughts at all lately, and to-day, this last day of all perhaps, I have not once remembered him.

'Give my love to him—and, doctor, I should like him to have the portrait of Molly; it is in the next room.'

He nods to show that he understands, and so he goes, and I shall never see him more . . . he would have no mercy if I were here to-morrow; he would take her away from me, he would take her into the next room, . . . when I was gone, Philip and Manuela and all of them would come sometimes and look at her, perhaps Don Carlos would be brought in to see the little dying English child, . . . oh, how terrible it would be: she would open her eyes and look at them in terror, and call for me . . . it shall never be. . . .

It is very dark; there are no sounds except the piano and the church bell now and then; there is a soft wind that brushes by the window, on its way down to the sea . . . Molly, . . . we shall never see the sea again—never watch the great ships going past in the distance . . . There are people in the street now—I hear them passing to and fro, and laughing; it must be getting late. . . . Manuela comes in. She wears her best lace veil; it is fastened with a rose, and there are bright flowers in her bosom. She is smiling and thinking how grand she looks.

'Do you want anything?' she asks. 'The doctor said I was to sleep here,' she adds with a shudder, as though she were afraid of us. 'I shall be back by twelve; it is not ten yet.'

'No, I want nothing; I am much better, and going to sleep. You need not sleep here or come again; it would disturb us, and we shall both sleep well.'

'I do not want to come, if you are better, and one can do no good.' She shudders again, and I know that she is afraid of the sight of death.

'I cannot breathe with any one in the room. I would rather you did not trouble about us, please, Manuela.'

Her face shows how relieved she is. 'It is well, señora; I have friends too, and we are going to the

Dos de Mayo to see the gipsies dance. I have never seen them, but to-day they are here. They came to meet one of their chiefs; he stole a horse last St. John's Day at the fair at Segovia, but now he is on his way back to Granada, and they have come to meet him.'

'Yes, Manuela. Please go; we shall be quite safe.'

'José sleeps on the bench at the end of the passage; at twelve o'clock you will hear him go to it; and see, here is a bell which you can ring.'

She puts the bell down and is going round to Molly; but she stops before the glass as she passes, to arrange her flowers. She thinks of her party, smiles, and so forgets to go farther. I am thankful, for I cannot bear her bold black eyes to rest on Molly's face.

'Manuela, will you get me a shawl?' I ask, 'for this cold is terrible. There, in the trunk, you will find one. Wrap me round, please.' Molly is warm, but my teeth are chattering with cold.

'Certainly, señora,' she answers, eager to see inside the trunk. She lingers for a moment, looking in at the things, and I close my eyes, for a deadly pain possesses me, and I am afraid lest, thinking me worse, she should hesitate to go. A horrible throbbing is at my heart; I can feel every separate beat, and dread lest each one is the last—

a strange sensation, like the loosening of bands, a leaving-go of something that holds me body and soul together, makes me numb with fear. Death is coming to-night, there is something that makes me know that. . . . I feel Manuela put a soft shawl round my shoulders, so soft and warm it is like a caressing human hand; and then she goes to the door. I watch her open it. She does not look back at us; she is thinking of her flowers and of the gipsies, she is glad to hurry away. . . . I pull the shawl closer and closer round me, and then I remember its touch; it is the one Mrs. Greenside gave me—the one that the woman who gave it to her wore two hours before she died. Ah, poor soul, how she would shudder if she knew where it was now! . . . I am going to wear it while I kill Molly . . . for the night has come, this fearful night on which no morning must ever dawn for us. . . . Oh, am I mad? but—no—no; no, I am sane enough, and know too well—too well—too well. . . . It is getting late, and every minute, as it passes, leaves a terror behind it. . . . Molly, let me hold you once more before the time comes . . . my sweet and my dickie-bird, if I could but kiss the life out of you. . . . I must leave go, I must make haste, for the strange pain is coming, and I am growing cold already. . . . So many die with the night, and the darkness has come to sweep me away, to take me to

itself; come closer once more, for I cannot drag myself to you. Even in her sleep she knows me and kisses me, and moves uneasily, and whispers, 'Mother.' Ah, God! I shall never hear her say it more. . . . I feel under my pillow for the bottle, . . . as my fingers touch it all my life flashes back and goes through me and shivers and recoils . . . suddenly there is a sound of merriment—of merriment! of laughter in the street and in the distance, the twanging of guitars, and the sound of the gipsy chant once more. They come and pass . . . the sounds of happy feet and merry voices; . . . it is the gipsies; they are going to the Dos de Mayo to dance, and Manuela, and Philip, and Don Carlos, and Pedro—they will all be there, making merry . . . while Molly is dying—dying. . . .

. . . . . .

Oh, I cannot—cannot. Oh, doctor, have mercy, have mercy; I should not die if she might stay, for love is stronger than life or death, or than all the world . . . my own child, oh, it is cruel to take her from me. . . .

. . . . . .

'My own—I cannot . . . closer, closer, my babe: my life that is yours . . . that is going—going too, Molly . . . to-night, together. . . . Oh, your dear hair, warm and soft. . . .

So—so—die in mother's arms, my sweet, in

mother's arms, my own—mother who loves you so—not those cold hearts, but mother's—mother, who can do this—even this—this for love of you.

. . . . . .

It is surely an hour . . . an hour that I have lain here in cold despair, holding her tight and close. . . . I put my face down . . . but I am afraid to see her more . . . her face . . . there is a little chill upon it . . . she is dead! . . . she is dead—she is dead—dead. A shriek I cannot stifle escapes from me—a cry of agony and terror that comes from my lips suddenly, and seems to vanish swiftly, as if through an open door . . . and the stillness makes me hold my breath even while my face touches Molly—Molly who is dead . . . I wait and gasp and listen . . . and raise my head once more, and give one wild look quickly round the room. . . . It is empty . . . and still and desolate; . . . something has gone out of it, something has vanished that will never come into it more. . . . I am *alone*—alone—alone. She died in her mother's arms, tight and close—with mother's kisses on her hair—but I die here alone—alone in this awful stillness, while she lies dead and cold beside me. . . .

. . . . . .

Oh, Molly—Molly—you never gave me the message in your eyes, and I have dimmed *that* . . . I have dimmed that . . . you never gave me the

message—never—never. . . . Molly, I have seen your face, . . . I cannot; I am afraid afraid . . . dying and alone—alone—alone; there is a face, a white face, looking at me—l —there. . . . It is the white lily, the tall lily like an angel's face; it looks, and is sorry . . . but oh to see you once more, dead or aliv babe. . . . I must. . . . There I have pushed back—oh, my sweet, my sweet, my dickie-bird, —dead,—dead, and mother has killed you—mo the dear face is still, the eyes look up no more, lips can speak no more—dead—dead, and m has done it . . . mother who loves you so mother whom you will never call mother Good-bye, Molly, my little one; I am here saying good-bye to you who are *not* even here. It is coming . . . it must be the end, it mus something is loosening, and there is no pain- the last threads leaving go . . . leaving go— . . . Some one is here . . . is here . . . some standing beside me. . . . *You!* . . . oh, spe me . . . speak to me . . . but see . . . see tween us in this last hour yawns a chasm . . . and wider . . . and the darkness rises up be us. . . . I cannot see your face, you are so far . . . stretch out your hands, but no . . . bu the great gulf yawns wider and wider . . . and darkness rises higher and higher and cover

things . . . oh, speak . . . but you cannot hear. . . . There were no hands to take her when mine fell . . . there were none to leave her to . . . oh, speak . . . speak . . . turn your face . . . oh, have mercy!—mercy!—mercy! . . . though all the world shrink from me, surely you—you will understand . . . you who loved me so . . . who gave her—was she to die alone? . . . I give her back to you . . . but wider and wider yawns the gulf . . . higher the darkness rises . . . and hark! hark! is it the great sea I hear that comes . . . and comes . . . to roar through the chasm beneath? . . . mercy. . . . No mercy from you . . . even from you . . . the gulf stretches wider and wider . . . and the darkness is blacker—blacker . . . it is nothing—nothing—only a cold wind that wandered round the empty room and swept out towards the sea . . . alone—the—the darkness is coming, and something sweeps me away, on and on . . . and on . . . there is something going to and fro, it makes me giddy . . . to and fro . . . to and fro.

Molly! Molly! where is she? Won't you come to me, darling? . . . it is dark, and you cannot see, but don't you hear the rocking-horse—to and fro—to and fro? . . . Jack, my sonnie, where is Molly? . . . I stretch out my hand—

'The four-and-twenty sailors—'

don't you hear, my darling—Jack is singing . . Molly—baby Molly . . . oh, gone . . . gone . . gone—Molly.

THE END.

S. & H.

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